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A One Page Summary: Bialik's Love Poetry

This thesis explores some of the psychological aspects found in the poetic works of *Hayyim Nahman Bialik* (1873-1934). The goal of the thesis was multi-faceted. First, my advisor, Dr. Stanley Nash and I spent time translating some of Bialik's love poetry. Afterwards we analyzed it. Then we consulted past and current scholarship, both in Hebrew and in English regarding Bialik and his work. Finally, we wrote up the analysis of our findings, and commented on various existing scholarship.

The thesis has three main chapters, a preface which helps detail the goals of the project, and some concluding remarks. There is also an appendix which contains a copy of the main Hebrew article that we translated. The first chapter provides some background information about Bialik. The second chapter includes our translation and analysis of his poems. It is divided into three sections according to the chronology of his writings. The final chapter is a conclusion.

This paper contributes to the personal interpretations of Bialik's work. It involved translating and analyzing the poems that have love as their theme. Several secondary books and articles were used in consultation with our own interpretations. Bialik frequently employed biblical vocabulary, as well as made specific references to situations in the Torah. Therefore, special attention was paid to such allusions in his poetry, and such references were traced to their original sources. Overall, our attempt was to grasp how and why Bialik is so popular a figure in Israel and throughout the world.

The Love Poetry of *Hayyim Nahman Bialik*

Philip C. Rice

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

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Advisor: Dr. Stanley Nash

Acknowledgments

This process and product that is now this paper require that I mention a few people. Dr. Stanley Nash was an exceptional advisor, and deserves a very big thank you. He spent endless hours with me translating poems, and helping edit this work. The result is that my Hebrew improved -- and any improvement on my Hebrew is often a reflection of the instructor! Dr. Nash was not only was he giving of his time, but he was gentle with his criticism and insightful with his comments. Of all of my teachers at the Hebrew Union College, he has taught me the very most about Hebrew literature, especially about such poets as *Hayyim Nahman Bialik*. If you are a student considering a project with him, know that you are in good hands.

Hannah Sagi was both my Hebrew and Literature (*Sifrut*) teacher in Israel. She was the very first teacher to introduce me to the wonderful world that is Hebrew poetry. She is a remarkable member of the college and remains to this day the finest teacher I have ever had. Her knowledge of and love for the *Tanach*, the Hebrew language, and Israeli society inspired me to work in the area of literature. Thank you for serving as the key that helped unlock the door to Israeli culture.

Dr. William Cutter is worthy of naming. While studying with him in Los Angeles, his overall love of the tradition became contagious for my spouse and me. This brings me to my partner and soul-mate, Laurie Neuman Rice. As with everything, thank you for being ever so patient with me while I wrote this paper. If Bialik had been blessed to have been loved by such a woman of valor, his poetry would surely have reflected it. May you all live to 120!

Preface

The end-product that is this paper constituted a process. First, Dr. Stanley Nash and I translated some of the poems of *Hayyim Nahman Bialik* (1873-1934). We even rendered into English certain poems that had already existed in translation. We did this in order to work with the original Hebrew and provide fresh, authentic translations. As it is with all translations, the translator's choices of words provide a certain commentary. The following poems that appear in translation, as well as the modern Hebrew article which appears in the appendix, represent our best attempt to render them into English. Included within the text are the original Hebrew versions of the poems as well, in case the reader wants to consult them.

After translating the poems, we interpreted them, often consulting the ideas of several scholars from both the past and the present. Consistent with a number of literary critics in the past was the way they characterized Hebrew poetry composed at the turn of the twentieth century. Most of them emphasized how it recounted the national difficulties and political ambitions of the Jewish people. Scholars who reviewed the Hebrew style of poets such as Bialik, did not initially pay sufficient attention to the personal dimension of his poetry. Currently, however, a substantial amount of scholarship now exists that has focused on the more personal nature of his work. Hamutal Bar Yosef writes:

> Criticism of Bialik during the first half of the twentieth century favored the public aspect of his poetry at the expense of works dealing with personal themes. The last forty years, in contrast, have shown growing interest in the personal side of Bialik's oeuvre. A number of prominent critics have even come to view it as the essence of Bialik's achievement.[1]

[1] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity," in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern*

Bar Yosef further points out that one can never be sure about the biographical or psychoanalytical nature of all of Bialik's love poems. Still, thanks to her work, as well as the work of Yonatan Ratosh, Dan Miron, and David Aberbach, the personal aspects of Bialik's poetry have now received its due.

My thesis will examine the work of Bialik exclusively. This is because he is the greatest example of a Hebrew poet whose words are very personal, while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for the expression of the national, religious, and ideological longings of the Jewish people as a whole. In his day, Bialik's poetic style represented one that possessed both a new-sprung sense of aesthetic discovery, and a more modern awareness of the physical world.[2] The Encyclopedia of Judaism even goes so far as to refer to Bialik as the greatest Hebrew poet of modern times. His reputation is well-known throughout the land of Israel; a street in almost every city bares his name. So what is it about his character that so many people in the nation of Israel resonate to his poetry? The answer lies in the fact that his compositions not only address the ideological problems of his day, but actually act as a channel for the individual artistic forces of the poet himself.

Bialik was a highly complex human being, whose personal life certainly influenced his development as a poet, and his understanding of love. Bar Yosef writes, "There can be no question that Bialik's poetry expresses authentic personal experiences..."[3] This paper

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Hebrew and Yiddish Literature. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. P. 145.

[2] Rabinovich, Isaiah. Translated by M. Roston. *Major Trends in Modern Hebrew Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. P. 2.

[3] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity," in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. P. 145.

will, therefore, forgo the persistent nationalistic interpretations applied to his works, favoring instead the more personal approach. I will analyze selections of his love poetry, often tracing its roots back to its traditional sources, as well as comment on scholarly interpretations of it. Most importantly, I will attempt to better grasp Bialik-the-individual, and how and why he spoke for a generation of Jews.

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Early Influences on Bialik

"In the Beginning"

Bialik retained several happy memories from his early childhood, as is evidenced by some of the poems in which he writes about that time in his life.[1]

> His father leased lands and sold timber from the forests of the province of Volhynia where young Bialik first became enamored by the wonders of nature: the scamping squirrels, the twittering sounds of birds,[2] the fragrance of pine, the wetness of moss...[3]

This love of the natural world finds expression throughout the corpus of his work, and this paper mentions several examples. However, certain unfortunate circumstances also motivated Bialik's writing while growing up in Russia. His father, for instance, died when he was only seven years old. Bialik's poetry acts as a voice for expressing the sense of loss that resulted from this devastating experience. The pain of such feelings surely influenced his later notions of love as an adult. He writes specifically about the suffering his death caused his mother, the poverty they soon faced, and even the bitter hunger they experienced. It was not long before his mother, undergoing severe economic hardships, sent him to live with his father's father.

The poetry that Bialik composed about the time he spent living with his grandfather evidences his feelings of loneliness, isolation, and loss of innocence. Most scholars indicate that Bialik's grandfather was both pious and strict, and created an environment that David Aberbach describes as, "unbearably stifling,"[4] for Bialik. Still, it

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[1] Poems such as "*Zohar* -- Radiance" and "*Ha-Berekhah* -- The Pool."
[2] The bird and the butterfly are major images in Bialik's poetry.
[3] Ben-Sorek, Esor Winer. *Poems and Poets of Israel: Selected Masterpieces*. Boston: Boston University Press, 1967. P. 99.
[4] Aberbach, David. *Bialik*. New York: Grove Press, 1988. P. 2.

was under the tutelage of his grandfather that Bialik was first immersed in the study of the Jewish tradition. Shalom Spiegel writes, "Bialik owed to these years his excellent education in the classical texts of the religious tradition and his taste for omnivorous reading."[5] While Bialik considered becoming a rabbi, he secretly yearned to comprehend the culture of modern Europe. Seeking to flee his surroundings, he persuaded his grandfather to permit him to study at the famous yeshiva of Volozhin in Lithuania. His grandfather believed he could continue his Talmud studies there, but Bialik also sought an introduction to the humanities.

[5] Spiegel, Shalom. *Hebrew Reborn.* New York: Macmillan, 1930. P. 279.

Life in the Yeshiva

Bialik's poems reveal an undeniable command of the Jewish tradition, explicit references to mystical lore, a deep understanding of Russian Jewry, and a reasonable ambivalence toward the world of Talmudic study. Many of the themes of his poetry are, in large part, due to the time he spent in Volozhin cultivating knowledge about Judaism. Bialik even went so far as to call the yeshiva, "the place where the soul of the nation was molded."[6] The influence of the time he spent in Volozhin surfaces in poems such as, "*Ha-Matmid* -- The Talmud Student," written in 1894-95, after he left the yeshiva. In this masterpiece of poetry, discussed later in this paper, Bialik reveals the inner discord of the dedicated student, who must repress his natural desires for the ascetic study of Torah. A number of Bialik's later poems testify to this tension between lofty, spiritual ideas and Bialik's own earthy desires, a theme about which Adi Zemach writes extensively.

More and more Bialik retreated from the life he found at school to enroll in the world of poetry. As he became increasingly acquainted with European literature, specifically Russian poetry, he also began to embrace Zionist ideals. Bialik concurred with the notion that Jewish nationalism should harmonize itself with the increasing popularity of the Enlightenment. He soon fell under the spell of the teachings of Ahad Haam's more cultural and spiritual Zionism. Ahad Haam so fancied Bialik's poem, "*El Ha-Tzippor* -- To The Bird," that he helped him publish it. Composed when he was only nineteen years old, the poem offers a greeting to a young bird sitting on his windowsill. In it, Bialik imagines the bird to be a messenger from Zion. It is because of such works as "*El Ha-*

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[6] *Encyclopedia Judaica*. The entry, "Volozhiner," by Hayyim Ben Isaac.

Tzippor," that scholars have employed mostly nationalistic interpretations of his work. By 1891, the literary circle that formed around Ahad Haam in Odessa so attracted Bialik, that he left Volozhin. He departed for his first stay in the city that had become the center of modern Jewish culture in Southern Russia.

Bialik wrote several other poems during his stay in Volozhin and later about the time he spent there. Many of his works develop the theme known today as, "unfulfilled return." Poems such as, "*Bi-Teshuvati* -- Upon My Return," and "*Mi-Shut ba-Merhakim* -- From Wandering Afar," have a somber mood. Tears soon became a recurring motif in his poetry, often calling upon the sadness he experienced in his adolescence. In 1901, for instance, he published a poem called "*Shirati* -- My Song," in which he describes his mother's tear falling into the dough she is kneading. Ultimately, it is this tear that enters his body by way of the bread, and he transforms it into poetry.

Upon leaving Volozhin Bialik first made his way to Odessa for a short stay. However, he soon married and began work in his father-in-law's lumber business. By 1897 he was teaching the Hebrew language to young students, but his life as a teacher in a small Polish town was not satisfying. After approximately three years, he returned to Odessa, which was to be his home until after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Bialik's Poetic Creations About Love

(1895-1900)

At the end of the nineteenth century, Odessa was one of the cultural and intellectual centers of Jewish life, and its influence on Bialik was significant. During the years he lived there, Bialik was quite prolific. He composed numerous poetic creations about the themes of love and love lost. Some of his poems are clearly positive, while others quite troubling. One of the more prevalent themes in his work, for instance, is that of abandonment. This, perhaps, is a result of the loss of his father that he experienced at a very young age, and the subsequent loss of his childhood. Poems such as, "*Yatmut* -- Orphanhood," reflect this. In other poems, however, Bialik expresses the pain he feels as a direct result of losing the romantic love of a woman. And yet there are even other publications in which it is clearly Bialik that is the source of pain for another. Such is the case here with the poem, "*Michtav Katan Li Chatavah* -- She Wrote Me A Note," written in 1897. If possible, please consult the Hebrew in order to capture the poem's meter. It is lost in the English translation.

מִכְתָּב קָטָן לִי כָּתְבָה

מִכְתָּב קָטָן לִי כָּתְבָה,
וּבַמִּכְתָּב כָּתוּב לֵאמֹר:
„כָּל שֶׁנַּפְשִׁי כֹּה אָהֲבָה,
כָּל שֶׁרוּחִי כֹּה סִפְּחָה,

מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה לִי מְקוֹר חַיִּים,
מַשְׂאַת־נֶפֶשׁ וֶאֱמוּנָה –
אִם כָּל־אֵלֶּה, דּוֹד לְבָבִי,
מַעְיַן חַיַּי, נֶפֶשׁ נַפְשִׁי,
אִם כָּל־אֵלֶּה הָיוּ חֲלוֹם!

הֲשָׁכַחְתָּ! לֹא, לֹא תוּכַל!
לָא! לֹא תָּזִיד שְׁכֹחַ נֶצַח,
מַה־שֶּׁנָּתַן נִשְׁמַת רוּחַ
חַיִּים אַחַת אֶל־אַפֵּינוּ;
מַה־שֶּׁהִדְלִיק שֶׁמֶשׁ אַחַת
בַּשָּׁמַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ שְׁנֵינוּ;
מַה־שֶּׁיָּצַק חֲלוֹם פָּז אֶחָד
עַל־רוּחֵנוּ הַמְאֻחֶדֶת –
לָא! לֹא תָּזִיד יָד לִשְׁלֹחַ,
לִנְתֹּשׁ אֶת־הַפֶּרַח נָטַע
אֵל לְבַדּוֹ בִּלְבָבֵנוּ" –
קָרֹא אֶקְרָא אֶת־הַמִּכְתָּב.
וּכְיַד רַכָּה וַעֲנֻגָּה
תַּחֲרֹת פֹּה עַל־צוּר לְבָבִי
מִשְׁנֵה דִּבְרֵי הָאִגֶּרֶת:
„לָא! לֹא תָּזִיד יָד לִשְׁלֹחַ,
לִנְתֹּשׁ אֶת־הַפֶּרַח נָטַע
אֵל לְבַדּוֹ בִּלְבָבֵנוּ."

וּמִזְּהַב הָאוֹר הַבָּהִיר
הַשּׁוֹטֵעַ בְּעַד חַלּוֹנִי
אֶל־חֲדַר בֵּיתִי, תָּקוּם שֵׁנִית
תַּזְהִיר נֶגְדִּי דְּמוּת תַּבְנִיתָהּ;
הִנֵּה הִיא בְּעֶצֶם תֻּמָּהּ:
קַלָּה הִיא עַל כַּנְפֵי רוּחַ
וּכְצִפֹּרֶת כְּרָמִים תִּנְהַר,
כְּלִילַת אוֹר וּבַת נְגֹהוֹת,
כְּמוֹ מִן־אוֹר לְאוֹר נִבְרָאָה –
הִנֵּה הֵן הָעֵינַיִם,
תְּאֹמֵי יוֹנִים מְלֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶט,
שֶׁמִּמְּבוֹכוֹתֵיהֶן יָאִיר
חֶרֶשׁ חֶרֶשׁ אוֹר שֶׁל־שָׁלוֹם,
אוֹר שֶׁל־חֶסֶד, טֹהַר נֶפֶשׁ –

וּבִזְהַב הָאוֹר הַבָּהִיר
בְּתוֹכֵחָה חֲרִישִׁית קָמוֹת
נֶגְדִּי עַתָּה הָעֵינַיִם,

רִמִּיתִנִי בְּתוֹכַחְתֵּן;
דּוּמָם צוֹפוֹת וְשׁוֹאֲלוֹת:
הָהּ! הַאֻמְנָם כָּל־זֶה, דּוֹדִי,
הָיָה מִקְסָם שָׁוְא וַחֲלוֹם!

לֹא, תַּמָּתִי! כִּי אֲהַבְתִּי
וְאֹהֲבֵךְ בֶּאֱמוּנָה;
גַּם כִּי שַׁבְתִּי מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ –
מֵאַהֲבָה זֹאת עָשִׂיתִי;
זַכָּה אַתְּ מִהְיוֹת לִי חֲבֶרֶת,
קְדוֹשָׁה אַתְּ מִשֶּׁבֶת עִמִּי;
אַתְּ הֱיִי לִי אֵל וּמַלְאָךְ,
לָךְ אֶתְפַּלֵּל וְאֶעֶבְדֵךְ;
אַתְּ הֱיִי לִי זִכְרוֹן קֹדֶשׁ;
זִרְחִי לִי בְּאוֹר הַחַמָּה,
רִמְזִי לִי מִכּוֹכַב מָרוֹם,
קִרְאִי לִי מֵהַלְמוּת לִבִּי
וּבִרְסִיס דִּמְעָתִי רְעָדִי –
לָא! לְעָבְדֵךְ אֵל בְּרָאָנִי!
דִּמְעַת לֵילִי, רֹאשׁ אַנְחוֹתַי,
הַלְמוּת לִבִּי, נִשְׁמַת אַפִּי,
גַּם הָאַחֲרוֹן בַּחֲלוֹמוֹתַי –
אֵלֶּה יִהְיוּ קָרְבְּנוֹתַי
לָךְ אַקְרִיבָה עַד בֹּא יוֹמִי.

She Wrote Me A Note
(1897)

She wrote me a letter,
and in the letter was written:
"Everything that my soul loved so much,[7]
everything that my spirit nurtured,
What was to me a source of life,[8]
the object of hope[9] and my faith-
were all of these, the beloved of my heart,
the fountain of my life, the life of my life,
Were all of these just a dream?

Did you forget? You could not have!
No! You could not intentionally forget forever,[10]
that which infused a common breath of life into our nostrils;[11]
that which ignited one common sun
in the heavens, over both of our heads;
that which anointed one golden dream
upon our united spirits-
No! You could not have been so cruel-[12]
as to misappropriate, as to pluck the flowers
God Himself planted in our hearts-"
I read and read the letter repeatedly.
And as with a soft and tender hand[13]
it engraved here upon the rock of my heart[14]
the repeated words of the letter:[15]
"No! You could not have been so cruel,
as to misappropriate, as to pluck the flowers
that God Himself planted in our hearts."

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[7] Song of Songs 1:7.
[8] Psalm 36:10.
[9] Ezekiel 24:25.
[10] Psalm 74:19.
[11] Genesis 7:22 and I Samuel 22:16.
[12] Esther 2:21. The above translation is not literal. In the story of Esther the term "send out your hand" refers to the time when Mordekhai was sitting at the King's gate, and two of the Kings chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, sought to "kill" Ahasuerus.
[13] Isaiah 47:1.
[14] Psalm 73:26.
[15] Esther 9:22.

And from the gold of the bright light,[16]
flowing bountifully through my window
into the room of my house, there emerges again,
the image of her figure shining before me;
Behold, there she is in the essence of her purity:[17]
gliding upon the wings of the wind,[18]
and like a vineyard butterfly, floating,
the ultimate brightness, a child of radiance,
as from light into light was she created-
Look, just look at these eyes,[19]
twin doves[20]full of quiet,
out of whose pupils there shines,
secretly, silently, a light of peace,
a light of grace, purity of soul.

And in the gold of the bright light,
with a silent reprimand,
the eyes now stand up against me.
And they kill me with their reproach,
silently gazing and asking:
"Woe, all of this my beloved,
was it indeed only a mirage[21]or dream?"

No, my pure one! Truly I did love you
and I do love you faithfully;
Even if I left you,[22]out of love did I do this;
You are too pure to be my girlfriend.
You are too holy to live with me;
you remain for me a God or angel.
I will pray to you,[23]I will worship you,
you remain for me a holy memory.
Shine for me in the light of the sun-[24]
Twinkle for me from the stars high above-[25]
Call out to me from the beating of my heart,

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[16] Job 37:21.
[17] Job 21:23.
[18] II Samuel 22:11.
[19] Song of Songs 4:1.
[20] Song of Songs 5.
[21] Ezekiel 13:7.
[22] Ruth 1:16.
[23] Psalm 5:3.
[24] Isaiah 30:26.
[25] Job 22:12.

And quiver to me out of my teardrop.
No! To worship you God created me![26]
The tear of my night, my deepest sighs,
the pounding of my heart, the breath of my life,
and the very ultimate of my dreams,
let these be my sacrifices that I will offer up to you,
until the day I die.[27]

Bialik composed this poem creatively from the vantage point of a woman writing to him, followed by his response. The poem powerfully describes the disappointment that results from betrayed trust. The lady who is hurt is in disbelief that her former lover could have acted in so intentionally cruel a manner. She remains wondering: Was it all just a dream? Was everything that they had and shared together just a mirage? Clearly the two people in the poem, at some point, had a great deal going well in their relationship. Now, however, the woman feels jilted, confused, and angry. Previously they shared a common breath. Their connection is now split, and the source of this woman's life is severed. Bialik thus enables us as readers to feel the pain that comes with lost love.

Bialik employs several images from the world of nature in his poetry. With specific references in this poem to the sun, wind, flowers, rocks, butterflies, and lights, Bialik conveys a variety of thoughts and feelings to his readers. The use of light, for instance, has mystical and erotic connotations. The light is gold and bright like sunshine, and acts here as a positive force. It is this light that floods the room of his house and ushers in the memory of her figure which shines before him. Bialik then describes the woman as a vineyard butterfly, an animal that appears several times in the corpus of Bialik's work. The butterfly is also an image that frequently has erotic associations. In

[26] Malachai 2:10.
[27] I Samuel 26:10.

addition, the flowers of which he writes, claims the woman in the poem, were actually planted in their hearts by God.

As always, Bialik makes Hebrew come alive by drawing on a plethora of biblical and rabbinic vocabulary words, phrases, stories, and ideas. It was, in fact, one of Bialik's trademarks to make significant references to situations from the Torah. In the above poetic creation, for instance, Bialik allows the beauty of the Psalms to speak, while enticing the reader with familiar verses from the Song of Songs. His prophetic citations from Ezekiel, Malachai, and Isaiah, as well as those from the writings section of the *Tanach*, reveal more than just a mere command of the biblical text. Bialik generates his poetry from an authentic understanding of the Bible and Jewish tradition alike. Most interesting here, perhaps, is his use of the term *lishloach yad*, which Bialik employs to describe the woman's feelings in the poem. It is contained in the verse, "*Lo! Lo tazid yad lishloach.*" I have chosen to translate the verse loosely as, "No! You could not have been so cruel." The term's technical definition, as well as its use in the Book of Esther, specifically infers violence. Thus, the phrase employed here refers to his act of violently destroying their relationship.

It is of particular import that Bialik seeks to worship the woman in this poem as if she were God or some type of divine being. He has clearly placed her up upon a pedestal, as he purposefully uses the term, "*korb'notai*;" its root meaning sacrifice. Bialik certainly maintains feelings for her, and even writes that he still loves her and will love her forever. However, his feelings seem sullied, as if he feels guilty for having erotic longings. Perhaps

he is afraid of dealing with her in the erotic way that he would like to, as he depicts her as being pure.

> While Bialik accepts the Romantic view of woman, he is aware that such a figure cannot be a flesh-and-blood partner, but only a disembodied entity and source of inspiration.[28]

One can only guess if some sort of inhibitions have crept into Bialik's mind that have made it impossible for him to act in a normal, sexual way. In the end, he decides that their love must remain platonic, and that he can only offer up his prayers, tears, heart, and breath as sacrifices to her.

Adi Zemach suggests that Bialik had a tendency to distance himself from women. Perhaps he felt an inner discord: a tension between his own personal, erotic desires and the world of Talmudic law of which he was, at first, a part. This theme, according to Zemach and other scholars, is quite prevalent throughout his poetic works. Later on, this paper contains an elaboration on this hypothesis.

It is essential to note that Hebrew, at the time that this poem was written, was not a spoken language. Thus Bialik was one of the first figures to help revive its use, bridging the gap between history and modernity. Equal if not more revolutionary were the subjects that Bialik chose as his topics, and the fact that he expressed himself in what many Jews consider their holy tongue. His subjects were surely controversial, and written about by few other writers at the time.

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[28] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity," in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. P. 150.

> ...the very expression in Hebrew of love as physical attraction between a man and a woman, and especially the legitimation of such love, was viewed as perhaps the most dangerous of all assaults on the social order of Eastern European Jewry-which practiced a narrow system of arranged marriages, often at a young age.[29]

Bialik was using Hebrew to describe feelings of love and eroticism. This was highly problematic in his day. He was not only enriching the language, but was doing it in a radical manner.

Also present in several of Bialik's poems is an ecstatic feeling of happiness for having both emanated and escaped from the prison-like environment of the yeshiva world. Still, a personal, inner discord seems to surface in some of Bialik's poems. This tension is, perhaps, between the Judaism Bialik experienced, with its strictures concerning abstinence, and his own more personally erotic desires. According to Bialik's understanding of Talmudic Judaism, the way one should treat a woman in traditional Jewish society, contrasted greatly with his own inner longings. Yet at times, Bialik cannot help blaming women. The poem, "*Ha-Enayim Ha-Re'evot* -- Those Hungry Eyes," evidences his pain regarding his internal struggle and external pursuits. Bialik, in the poem, accuses a lover of seducing him away from the world of Judaism he experienced while under the auspices of his grandfather, and while studying in the Volozhin yeshiva.

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[29] Ibid., Pps. 147-8.

הָעֵינַיִם הָרְעֵבוֹת

הָעֵינַיִם הָרְעֵבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה שֶׁכָּכָה תִּתְבַּעְנָה,
הַשְּׂפָתַיִם הַצְּמֵאוֹת הָאֵל הַשֹּׁאֲלוֹת: נַשְּׁקֵנוּ!
הַסְּפָרִים הָעֹרְגִים הָאֵלֶּה הַקּוֹרְאִים: תָּפְשֵׂנוּ!
חֲמוּדוֹתַיִךְ הַצְּפוּנוֹת שֶׁשָּׂבְעָה כִּשְׁאוֹל לֹא־תֵדָעְנָה;

כָּל־עֲתֶרֶת הַהֲוָיָה הַזֹּאת שִׁפְעַת חֶמְדָּה מְלֵאָה,
כָּל־הַשְּׁאָר הַלָּזֶה, כָּל־הַבְּשָׂרִים הָאֵלֶּה שֶׁכָּכָה
הִלְעִיטוּנִי מִמְּקוֹר תַּעֲנוּגִים, מִמַּעְיַן הַבְּרָכָה –
לוּ יָדַעַתְּ, יָפָתִי, מַה־קָּצָה בָּם נַפְשִׁי הַשְּׂבֵעָה.

זַךְ הָיִיתִי, לֹא־דָלַח הַסַּעַר רִגְשׁוֹתַי הַזַּכִּים
עַד שֶׁבָּאת, יְפֵה־פִיָּה, וּבְרוּחֵךְ נָשַׁפְתְּ וְדִלַּחְתְּ.
וַאֲנִי, נַעַר פֹּתֶה, לְרַגְלַיִךְ בְּלִי־חֶמְלָה הִשְׁלַכְתִּי
תֹּם לְבָבִי, בֹּר רוּחִי, כָּל־פִּרְחֵי נְעוּרַי הָרַכִּים.

רֶגַע קָטָן מֵאֹשֶׁר הָיִיתִי בְּלִי־חֹק, וַאֲבָרֵךְ
אֶת־הַיָּד הַחֹלֶקֶת לִי מַכְאוֹב הָעֹנֶג הֶעָרֵב;
וּבְרֶגַע קָטָן שֶׁל־תַּעֲנוּג, שֶׁל־אֹשֶׁר וָגִיל, עָלַי חָרַב
עוֹלָם מָלֵא – מַה־גָּדוֹל הַמְּחִיר שֶׁשַּׁתִּי בִּבְשָׂרֵךְ!

Those Hungry Eyes
(1901)

Those hungry eyes that are searching...
Those thirsty lips asking: KISS US!
Those two breasts are like lusting fawns[30] which call: SEIZE US!
Your secret charms which cannot be satiated like *Sheol*.[31]

Plenitude of abundance, this body overflows with full desire.
All this flesh, all this voluptuousness that
causes me to drink from the spring of pleasure, from the fountain of blessing.[32]
If only you knew, my beautiful one, how much I was disgusted with these
when my soul[33] was satiated.[34]

I was pure, the storm had not muddied my unsullied feelings,
until you came, you gorgeous thing, and with the one breath you blew, I was soiled.[35]
And I, a foolish lad, callously threw down at your feet
all my innocence of heart,[36] my purity of spirit, my delicate flowers of youth.

For a brief moment I was happy, without limit[37] and I blessed
the hand that dispensed,[38] the sweet pain of the pleasure,
and for a brief moment of pleasure, of happiness, and joy
my whole world crumbled.
How high the price was that I paid for your flesh!

Bialik's excellence lies heavily upon his ability to draw upon the Jewish tradition to reveal the depth of the characters in his poetry. He was so well-versed in the tradition that his use of it for erotic descriptions upset the literate populace of Jews. His references to the *Tanach* in this poem alone include significant citations from the Song of Songs and the Book of Exodus. The third verse in the first stanza contains the Song of Songs excerpt,

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[30] Song of Songs 4:5.
[31] Proverbs 27:20 and Isaiah 55:11.
[32] Proverbs 25:26.
[33] Numbers 21:5.
[34] Proverbs 27:7.
[35] Exodus 16:10.
[36] Genesis 20:5 and Psalm 101:2.
[37] Isaiah 5:14.
[38] Isaiah 34:17.

"two breasts are like lusting fawns."[39] Bialik's endows the breasts in his poem with sexual "hunger." In addition, the phrase expressed in the second line of the third stanza, "and with your breath you blew," appears in the Song of Moses, found in Exodus 15:10. It is this breath that causes the sea to surround the mighty Egyptians. This wind causes them to sink like "lead in water," thus soiling their plan and their lives.

The charms of the woman about which Bialik writes in this poem clearly entice him. One might even say they torment him. David Biale, in his book, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*, argues that women often compete for the hearts of Jewish men. And with what do they compete? They compete with the purity of God's law.[40] Bialik speaks here as probably only one of the many young men who felt lured away from the precincts of Jewish sexual restraint and purity by temptations of the flesh. Bialik, who writes endlessly about the theme of loss, captures the attention of many of his readers. Several Jewish men at that time began to leave the world of Talmudic Judaism. Bialik's world of poetry provided them refuge, a place to which they could escape. The feelings expressed in his poems resonate with such readers.

In this poem, sexuality has sullied the, "foolish lad." The boy in the poem remains unhappy about the loss of his innocence and feels anger towards the woman. The biblical phrase, "innocence of my heart," from the last verse of the third stanza, expresses his tender vulnerability. Drawing, as usual, from the *Tanach*, this phrase can be traced both to Genesis 20:5 and also to Psalm 101:2. Bialik represents then, one of, if not the

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[39] Song of Songs 4:5.
[40] Biale, David. *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. P. 175.

foremost, modern writer to incorporate biblical and rabbinic expressions in provocative ways.

Bialik's popularity at the time was largely due to the scarcity of other Hebrew poets who described the most intimate notions of falling in love. Bar Yosef writes about the remoteness of the possibility that a young Jewish man, however enlightened, would even actually come to experience such love.[41] She suggests that it was all just a fantasy, and reminds us to consider other literary movements at that time. She challenges us to reflect on how the literary movements of Romanticism and Decadence influenced Bialik.

If we are to consider other literary movements, we must also take into account the cultural backdrop of other, more dominant religious and societal traditions at the time. The anger Bialik expresses in this poem is, perhaps, more Freudian in nature. It is, therefore, less specifically Hebraic or Jewish. Bialik's problem stems, then, from the difficulties of sexual repression that Freud saw as common to all of Western society. Puritanical attitudes towards sex are not unique to Judaism. Written in 1901, Bialik is merely expressing here the attitudes of many young men who longed for sex and love, while living largely within a sexually repressed community.

One cannot be sure, but perhaps some woman from Bialik's past corrupted his idea of love. Maybe someone teased him to no avail, and caused him frustration. Conceivably, Bialik feels tormented by his erotic longings. Therefore, he chooses merely to vent his

[41] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity." in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. P. 148.

anger at this woman. Such is the case in a short story Bialik published years later called, "Behind the Fence." The story is discussed at the end of this paper. (See Page 63.)

Bar Yosef also points out an important element in the poem which builds as the verses continue. In the first stanza we learn about the woman's body and its secret charms. Throughout the end of the second stanza, the woman is understood only in terms of her flesh -- a flesh which is lustful and plentiful.

> The detailing of the woman's demanding limbs in the first stanza proceeds up the scale of sexuality from eyes, to lips, breasts, and finally to those more "hidden enchantments."[42]

Bialik dismembers the woman's body and thus, treats her as a sexual object. In addition, he writes of the woman with reference specifically to her physique and its many parts, which appear in the plural. He thus portrays her body virtually as a gang waiting to ambush him.

In 1901, Bialik also published an entire poem on the notion of ambush that he titled, "*Ha-Lailah Aravti* -- Tonight I Lay Stalking." In it, the speaker petitions a young woman to come to the window as he lies in wait below.

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[42] Ibid., P. 154-5.

הַלַּיְלָה אָרַבְתִּי

הַלַּיְלָה אָרַבְתִּי עַל־מִדְרָךְ
רָאִיתִךְ שׁוֹמֵמָה הֲחֲרַשְׁתְּ;
בְּעֵינַיִךְ הַנְּבוּכוֹת בַּחַלּוֹן
נִשְׁמָתֵךְ הָאוּבָדָה בִּקַּשְׁתְּ –

בִּקַּשְׁתְּ אֶת־נִמּוֹל חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ –
וְאַתְּ לֹא־רָאִית, אֲהוּבָתִי,
כִּי כְיוֹנָה חֲרֵדָה בְּחַלּוֹנֵךְ
הִתְחַבְּטָה, הִתְלַבְּטָה נִשְׁמָתִי.

Tonight I Lay Stalking
(1901)

Tonight, I was lying in wait by your room,[43]
and I saw you looking forsaken and so quiet;
with your troubled eyes through the window,
you were searching for your lost soul.

You were seeking some requital for the loyalty of your young years,[44]
and you did not see, my beloved,

that like a troubled dove at your window,
my soul fluttered in anguish.

[43] Judges 16:12.
[44] Jeremiah 2:2.

In this poem we see two main themes captured by Bialik. As he does so often, he writes about lost youth and the pain of love that goes unnoticed. He therefore uses the Hebrew term *aravti*, stressing, perhaps, the idea that some young men are afraid to come out openly and declare their love; instead they hide and stalk their beloved. Maybe it is more accurate to assume that the man feels so heartsick that he lingers outside of her window. Or perhaps he did not have the courage to confront her directly, so he loiters nearby in secret. Also employed by Bialik is the familiar biblical bird, the dove. In this poem, however, it is the man's soul that is compared to a dove that flutters outside the woman's window in anguish, yet goes unnoticed.

(1902-1905)

It is no less than full immersion in the Hebrew and the Jewish Tradition that allows Bialik to write poetry through such an authentically spiritual and creative lens. In this next poem, "*Im Dimdumey Hahamah* -- At Twilight," he records a direct reference to the "twilight hour." This hour, according to both Kabbalistic and Hasidic tradition, is the time when, "God's thought is especially directed toward men (sic). It is the hour of grace: the gates of heaven are opened."[45] Bialik takes this idea of the holiness of twilight and dedicates an entire poem to that time of the day. He expresses simultaneously great intimacy and his cynicism regarding his resulting feelings.

[45] Burnshaw, Stanley and Carmi, T., and Spicehandler Ezra. *The Modern Hebrew Poem, Itself.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers, 1965. P. 28.

עִם דִּמְדּוּמֵי הַחַמָּה

עִם דִּמְדּוּמֵי הַחַמָּה אֶל־הַחַלּוֹן בֹּאִי
וְאֵלַי הִתְרַפָּקִי,
לִפְתִּי הֵיטֵב צַוָּארִי, שִׂימִי רֹאשֵׁךְ עַל־רֹאשִׁי –
וְכֹה עִמִּי תִּדָּבֵקִי.

וּמְחֻשָּׁקִים וּדְבֵקִים, אֶל־הַזֹּהַר הַנּוֹרָא
דּוּמָם נִשָּׂא עֵינֵינוּ;
וְשִׁלַּחְנוּ לַחָפְשִׁי עַל־פְּנֵי יַמֵּי הָאוֹרָה
כָּל־הִרְהוּרֵי לִבֵּנוּ.

וְהִתְנַשְּׂאוּ לַמָּרוֹם בִּיעָף שׁוֹקֵק כְּיוֹנִים,
וּבַמֶּרְחָק יַפְלִיגוּ, יֹאבֵדוּ;
וְעַל־פְּנֵי רִכְסֵי אַרְגָּמָן, אִיֵּי־זֹהַר אַדְמוֹנִים,
בִּיעָף דּוּמָם יֵרֵדוּ.

הֵם הָאִיִּים הָרְחוֹקִים, הָעוֹלָמוֹת הַגְּבֹהִים
זוּ בַּחֲלוֹמוֹת רְאִיתוּם;
שֶׁעֲשׂוּנוּ לְגֵרִים תַּחַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם,
וְחַיֵּינוּ – לְגֵיהִנֹּם.

הֵמָּה אִיֵּי־הַזָּהָב זוּ צָמֵאנוּ אֲלֵיהֶם
כְּאֶל אֶרֶץ מוֹלֶדֶת;

שֶׁכָּל־כּוֹכְבֵי הַלַּיִל רָמְזוּ לָנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם
בְּאוֹר קֶרֶן רוֹעֶדֶת.

וַעֲלֵיהֶם נִשְׁאַרְנוּ בְּלִי־רֵעַ וְעָמִית
כִּשְׁנֵי פְרָחִים בַּצִּיָּה;
כִּשְׁנֵי אֹבְדִים הַמְבַקְשִׁים אֲבֵדָה עוֹלָמִית
עַל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ נָכְרִיָּה.

At Twilight
(1902)

At twilight,[46] please come to the window[47]
and nestle against me,[48]
Clasp my neck firmly, put my head upon your head -
and thus hold me tight.[49]

Hugging and embracing,
Silently, let us lift our eyes;
to the awesome brightness,
and we will set loose[50] upon the face of the sea of light,
all of our heartfelt thoughts.

And they will soar to the heavens[51] in an eager flurry like doves,
and in the distance they will sail, and disappear;
And upon the purple mountain ridges, red islands of brightness,
in a swooping flight they will descend silently.

These are the distant islands, the lofty worlds,
that we envisioned in our dreams;[52]
That transformed us into strangers beneath all the heavens,[53]
and made our lives into Hell!

These are the golden isles for which we thirsted,
like for a homeland;
about which all the stars of the night[54] hinted to us,
by means of the light of a quivering ray.

And upon which we were left without a friend or companion,
like two flowers in the desert;
like two wanderers seeking to find something lost for eternity,
wandering over the face of a foreign land.[55]

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[46] Another possible translation is, "the sun flickers."
[47] Genesis 27:25.
[48] Song of Songs 8:5.
[49] Ruth 2:8.
[50] Exodus 21:27.
[51] Psalm 68:19.
[52] Genesis 31:10.
[53] Deuteronomy 2:25.
[54] Job 3:8.
[55] Exodus 2:22, 18:3.

This poem, one analysis of which is found in the book, *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, begins with three familiar Hebrew phrases from Genesis, the Song of Songs, and the Book of Ruth, respectively. The first citation relives the gentleness of Jacob's request; that his son come close, kiss him, and receive his blessing. The second is an enticing sexual invitation to be close that possesses mystical connotations. And the third recalls Boaz's redemption of Ruth. It is also worth noting that the opening Hebrew, the poem's actual title, captures some of the color of this time of day. Bialik employs paronomasia with reference to the blood-red of sunset with the word, "*dimdumim*."

Bialik also draws upon several natural images in the poem, including, "purple mountain ridges, the sea of light, doves, and flowers." Several of his allusions are to mystical doctrine. He writes of, "*d'vekut* -- clinging," and, "*zohar* -- brightness," as well as the meditations of one's heart. He also employs such motifs as, "islands of brightness, golden isles." Both images might represent here the distance or alienation he feels from the world, as these mystical realms of his dreamworld are far off and lie out of reach.[56] The subject matter here evokes feelings of longing and sadness. The phrase, "flowers in the desert," is troubling, perhaps recounting the difficulty for his feelings of love to grow.

What eventually happened to the lovers in the poem? "The realization of their dream is a tragic realization."[57] The magical place where they long to be is described as a, "*eretz nokhriah* -- foreign land." In this land they will always feel like a "*ger v'nokhri* --

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[56] Burnshaw, Stanley and Carmi, T., and Spicehandler Ezra. *The Modern Hebrew Poem, Itself*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers, 1965. P. 29.
[57] Ratosh, Yonatan. "The Poetry of Foreign Love by Bialik," as it appears in Gershon Shaked, ed., *Bialik, Yetsirato le-Sugehah bi-Re'i ha-Biqqoret*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974. P. 53.

stranger and outsider." The utopia is unattainable, and they are unhappy that they cannot achieve it. For whatever reason, perhaps religion, the dream is simply not capable of being realized. The famous critic, Aryeh Strauss understands this dilemma as one that forms a covenant between two people who long for a distant and beautiful world. The characters in the poem are longing for an unattainable golden age.

> Bialik's reservations about Romantic love are even more evident in *'Im dimdumei hahamah* ' [With Twilight] (1902). The image of the lovers that appears at the beginning of the poem takes the Romantic idea of love to its extreme. Standing by the window looking out at the limitless distances, the man and woman are merged into one entity, united in their longing for the "golden isles" which represent dreams and ideals...Social disconnection and *ennui* are the fate of those who devote their lives to such Romantic love. Here Bialik depicts love as a total physical and spiritual fusion, yet he finds in this experience a key not to heaven, but rather to a barren hell.[58]

What Bialik is potentially expressing here is the tragedy that Jewish intellectuals are unable to love in an earthy or uninhibited, erotic way.

Adi Zemach provides an opposing interpretation of the poem. According to Zemach the two lovers have, in fact, reached the wonderful world. However, they feel disappointed with it. The world of love is not what they expected. There is no peace of mind, no "*nachat* -- rest," or pleasure on the islands of gold.

> All of our lives they have been made into a Hell because of our longing to reach them, however, after we have dared, traveled far, and arrived, we are desperately disappointed: the flowers of lust have become stuck in the wilderness without my companion.[59]

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[58] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity," in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. Pps. 150-1.

[59] Zemach, Adi. *Ha-Lavi ha-Mistatter*. Tel Aviv: "Kiryat Sepher," 1969.

Zemach identifies such intimacy as having no place within the borders of the golden isles. He presents the problem as one in which Jewish or Western individuals are not capable of giving full expression to their sexual needs. In essence, feelings of guilt or prudery interfere.

In 1904, Bialik published the poem, "*Ayekah* -- Where Are You?" In it, he again addresses the theme of abandonment. He appeals to a young woman to return, so that she might rescue him from his current state of despair.

אַיֵּךְ

מִמְּקוֹם שֶׁאַתְּ נִסְתֶּרֶת שָׁם, יְחִידַת חַיַּי
וּשְׁכִינַת מַאֲוַיַּי –
הִגָּלִי־נָא וּמַהֲרִי בֹאִי, בֹּאִי
אֵלַי מַחֲבוֹאִי;
וּבְעוֹד יֵשׁ בְּאֶלָּה לִי – צְבָאִי וּמְאֹלִי
וּמָלְכִי עַל־גּוֹרָלִי;
וְיוֹם אֶחָד גִּלַּת נְעוּרַי לִי הָשִׁיבִי
וַהֲמִיתִנִי עִם־אֲבִיבִי.
וְתַחַת שְׂפָתוֹתַיִךְ יִכְבֶּה־נָא נִיצוֹצִי
וּבֵין שָׁדַיִךְ יוֹמִי אוֹצִיא,
כִּגְוֹעַ בַּעֲרֹב הַיּוֹם בֵּין פִּרְחֵי בְשָׂמִים
צִפֹּרֶת כְּרָמִים.

אַיֵּךְ?

וַאֲנִי עוֹד לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי וָמָה אַתְּ –
וּשְׁמֵךְ עַל־שְׂפָתַי רָעַד,
וּכְרִצְפַּת אֵשׁ בַּלֵּילוֹת עַל־מִשְׁכָּבִי
בָּעַרְתְּ בִּלְבָבִי;
וָאֵבְךְּ בִּנְדוּדֵי לֵיל, וָאֶשֹּׁךְ כָּרִי
וּלְזִכְרֵךְ כָּלָה בְשָׂרִי;
וְכָל־הַיּוֹם בֵּין אוֹתִיּוֹת הַגְּמָרָא,
בְּקֶרֶן אוֹר, בִּדְמוּת עָב בָּרָה,
בַּזַּכָּה מִתְּפִלּוֹתַי וּבְטֹהַר־הִרְהוּרַי,
בִּנְעִים הֶגְיוֹנַי וּבְגֹדֶל־יִסּוּרַי –
לֹא־בִקְּשָׁה נַפְשִׁי כִּי אִם־הִגָּלוֹתֵךְ,
רַק־אוֹתָךְ, אוֹתָךְ, אוֹתָךְ...

Where Are You?
(1904)

From the place where you are hidden,
Oh treasure of my life and sanctuary of my longings-
Please reveal yourself and quickly come
to my hiding place;
and while I might yet be saved - come and rescue me
and rule over my destiny;
and in one day restore to me what was lost in my youth,
and give me quietus just as I reach my springtime.
Under your lips, please let my soul be extinguished
and between your breasts I will expire at the end of the day,
just like vineyard butterflies die among fragrant flowers
with the coming of evening.

Where are you?

And I still do not know who you were and what you were-
and yet your name trembled upon my lips,
and like a burning ember of fire during the night upon my bed
you were burning in my heart.
And I wept, in fitful sleeplessness, bit my pillow
and my flesh was pining as I remembered you;
and all day long between the letters of the *gemarah*,
in a ray of light, in the image of a pure cloud,
in the purest of my prayers and in my purest meditations,
in my most pleasant thoughts, and in my greatest sufferings,
my soul sought nothing but for you to be revealed,
only you, only you...

Bialik uses nature throughout the corpus of his work. Here he compares his life span to that of butterflies, his pain to the torture of fire burning his heart, and the purity for which he longs to return to a pure cloud. Bialik frequently employs the image of the cloud, and Zemach comments extensively on its implications. He puts forth the theory that there exists two, distinct types of love according to Bialik, and his poetry reflects both. There is the lofty type represented by the pure, white cloud. And then there is the more earthy, erotic type, represented by a ray of light.

In the above poem, even the title has biblical connotations. The biblical author uses the word, "*ayekah*," in the third chapter of Genesis. In this story God asks Adam where he is, right after he has eaten of the forbidden fruit. The question is not just where, but also how? How could this woman from the poem, like Adam from the biblical narrative, have abandoned him? And as it is with God's disappointment, Bialik, like Adam, also seeks refuge and help. He longs for the young woman to return and save him. The poem contains numerous religious and messianic connotations. He implies that her return might make up for his lost youth. Inevitably, it is clear that the man in the poem is lost without her.

In the poem's first stanza Bialik employs the term, "*y'chidat chayai* -- the only one." This phrase possesses specific religious and sexual connotations. In terms of religion, the term is often applied to uniting with the one and only God. Here, however, the words together imply that the relationship between the man and the woman in the poem is of an erotic nature. The phrase that immediately follows it acts in a similar fashion. "*U'shechinat avayai* -- the dwelling place of my longings," also projects both sexual and religious messages. Mystically the term *shechinah* refers to the feminine aspects of God. In this case it is followed by a word that causes the entire phrase to be rendered as the place of the man's sexual desires. It is as if the woman about which Bialik writes is a semi-divine figure, since he continuously mixes these erotic and religious images.

As witnessed before in the poem, "*Michtav Katan Li Chatavah* -- She Wrote Me A Note," it is a ray of light that ushers in thoughts of his lover. It is this lover that

consumes his very being at all times. This is apparent because of Bialik's signature. He refers at this point to the world of the Talmud. He contrasts the length of a day studying *gemarah* in the second stanza of the poem, with the length of the life of a vineyard butterfly. The first day is seemingly endless and the latter, very brief. Yet the death of the butterfly is, perhaps, understood as an intense moment of joy.

Bialik dedicated an entire poem to the mystery of the butterfly. He published the poem in 1904, with the title, "*Tzipporet* -- Butterfly," instead of using the more common modern Hebrew word, *parpar*. The poem draws heavily upon nature as it conveys to its readers Bialik's unachieved, ideal understanding of love. In writing such poetry, Bialik revealed his own sexual longings. It is, perhaps, the case that the woman described in this next poem wasted her young years on another lover. Or maybe it is that in her forlorness, she did not pay enough attention to the poet, a loving individual who could give the poor woman what she lacked. Either Bialik is too shy to make overtures to her or the woman has already rebuffed him. Perhaps it is even worse and she has paid no attention to him at all.

צִפֹּרֶת

כָּל־הָעוֹלָם טוֹבֵעַ בָּאוֹר וּבַשִּׁיר,
אוֹצְרוֹת חַיִּים לֹא־שְׁעַרְתִּים מִסָּבִיב מִתְרַחֲשִׁים,
וּבַמִּשְׁעוֹל הַגּוֹמֵא בֵּין יַעַר וָנִיר
שְׁנֵינוּ הוֹלְכִים וּמַחֲשִׁים.
אָנוּ הוֹלְכִים וְהוֹלְכִים, לִשְׁבִילֵנוּ אֵין קֵץ,
אֲפָסֵנוּ שִׁבֳּלִים, כְּתָרֵנוּ צִפֳּרוֹת,
וּבַחֲנִיתוֹת שֶׁל־זָהָב יְפַגְּעֵנוּ כָּל־עֵץ
וּבִצְאֱלֵי צַמָּרוֹת.

הֲדָמוּת כְּרוּב אִם־עָב קַלָּה בְּרוּם עוֹלָם רִפְרְפָה?!
אַךְ גַּם־הִיא חִישׁ הִפְלִיגָה לִמְדִינַת הַיָּם –
וְאֶת־הִרְהוּרֵי הַטָּהוֹר כָּמוֹהָ רָם
נָשְׂאָה עִמָּהּ לָנֶצַח עַל־כְּתֵפָהּ.
וְשׁוּב זֹהַר רָקִיעַ, וְשׁוּב תְּכֵלֶת בְּלִי־סוֹף,
אַתְּ הוֹלֶכֶת בָּרֹאשׁ וַאֲנִי כָּרוּךְ אַחֲרַיִךְ,
וּבְקָמוֹתַיִךְ הַמְּלֵאוֹת הִשְׂתָּרַע הַנּוֹף,
וְהַכֹּל בָּהִיר בּוֹ כְּמוֹ בְעֵינַיִךְ.

רֶגַע אֶחָד לִי נִדְמָה: בַּיַּעַר הַלָּז,
הַמַּאֲפִיל וּמֵשִׁיב צִנָּתוֹ עָלֵינוּ,
נָזוּ מִטְּמוֹן מִסְתָּרִים, הַמְּשֻׁמָּר מֵאָז
וּמֵעוֹלָם לִשְׁנֵינוּ –
פִּתְאֹם רָחֲפָה הַקָּמָה – וּמִפָּה אֱלֵי־פָה
עָבַר רֶטֶט קְרָנַיִם עַל־פְּנֵי הָאוֹקְיָנוֹס.

הוֹ, מִי הִשְׁלִיג עָלֵינוּ – וּבְשֶׁפַע כָּזֶה,
חֵיל צִפֳּרוֹת לְבָנוֹת?!

וְהִנֵּה נִקְלְעָה צִפֹּרֶת כְּפָרַח בִּקְצֵה
שְׂעַר מַחְלַפְתֵּךְ הַמְּפֻזָּזָה עַל־הַמַּחְגֹּרֶת,
וּכְמוֹ רָמְזָה לִי: בָּחוּר, קוּם שְׁקָה־לָהּ, וְדַמֵּה
אֵלַי הַצִּפֹּרֶת!
אוּלָם אַתְּ – הִהְרַגַּשְׁתְּ בַּצִּפֹּרֶת וָבִי?!
הִהְרַגַּשְׁתְּ, כִּי גַם־נַפְשִׁי נְתוּנָה בַשֶּׁבִי,
וּמְפַרְפֶּרֶת וּתְלוּאָה, וּמְצַפָּה לִישׁוּעָה
בְּמַחְלַפְתֵּךְ הַקְּלוּעָה?!

וּבְעֵינַיִךְ שׁוּב אָצִיץ וַאֲבַקֵּשׁ שָׁם תְּשׁוּבָה –
וּכְבַתְּחִלָּה הֵן צְנוּעוֹת, שְׁתֵּי יוֹנֵי תַּמָּן:
מַה־לִּי צְנִיעוּת עֵינַיִךְ – וּמַחְלַפְתֵּךְ מְשׁוּבָה,
הִיא אוֹמֶרֶת לִי: הֵן!
מַהֲרִי, מַהֲרִי, אֲחוֹתִי, נָבוֹאָה הַיַּעְרָה,
תַּחַת חֻפַּת אֲשֶׁרָיו לָךְ כָּל־נַפְשִׁי אָפִיקָה,
וְאֶת־כָּל־אַהֲבָתִי הַתְּלוּיָה בְשַׂעֲרָהּ
נָמִית שְׁנֵינוּ בִּנְשִׁיקָה.

Butterfly
(1904)

All the world is immersed in light and in song,
treasures of life not estimated happening all around.
And in the extended path between the forest and the field,
the two of us walk quietly.
We walk and walk, there is no end to our path,
Enveloping us are ears of corn, butterflies surround our heads,
and with spears of gold from every tree,
we are pierced with the shadows of treetops.

Is it the image of a small cloud or a cherub,
fluttering high above the world?
But it too sails quickly to a land beyond the sea?
and carried away with it forever on its shoulder,[60]
my thought as pure and lofty as this cloud.
And again the radiance of the sky and again blueness[61]without end,
you walk ahead and I follow after you, clinging,
and with its fields full of grain, the landscape sprawls,
and everything in it is bright as in your eyes.

For a moment I imagined: that in that forest
that one that darkens and breaths its chill upon us,
there is a secret, hidden treasure-
preserved from the immemorial and forever for the two of us.
Suddenly, the standing corn rustled - and from one end to another[62]
there passed a quiver of rays over the ocean waters.
Oh, who caused this snow shower on us, and in such rich abundance,
a host of white butterflies?

And behold a butterfly became entangled like on a fragile flower
in the braid of your hair, bouncing upon your back,
and as if it was hinting to me: young lad, arise and kiss her,[63]and be like
the butterfly to me.[64]
Were you aware of the butterflies and of me?

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[60] Ezekiel 12:6.
[61] Daniel 12:3.
[62] Ezra 9:11.
[63] Genesis 27:26.
[64] Song of Songs 2:17.

Did you feel that my soul too was in captivity,[65] in need of rescue[66]
and was fluttering, and suspended, and awaiting salvation in your twisted braid,
And in your eyes again I will gaze, and I will seek there an answer-
and they are as chaste as always these two lovely doves;[67]
What do I care about, the modesty of your eyes-
and when your braid is flirtatious,
saying to me: YES!
Hurry, Hurry my beloved, let us go to the woods,
Under the canopy of its trees, I will pour out my entire soul to you,[68]
and all of my love that is hanging by a hair,
the two of us will give quietus with a kiss.

In this poem, Bialik vividly describes a walk through nature that he takes with the one whom he loves. He paints a very positive picture of the natural world through images such as spears of gold, treetop shadows, butterflies, and the familiar pure, lofty cloud. Such images help the reader to walk along the edge of the forest with this couple. The poem opens with the erotic image of light and song which fill the world so much such that the earth is drowning in them. The wealth and treasures of life depict abundance that it is unimaginable. The message of the poem is clear: the man in the poem is in love! The path on which the two walk together is never-ending, expressing the same hope about their relationship. The erotic images of the butterflies and the light contrast with the small cloud and cherub. Bialik's lofty thoughts are eternally lifted up. The blue sky, like the path that the two walk together, is, itself, without end. A cat-and-mouse game then ensues as the girl walks ahead, and the man follows her. Again everything in the world is described as illuminated.

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[65] Isaiah 46:2
[66] Lamentations 4:17.
[67] Song of Songs 4:1.
[68] Isaiah 58:10.

In the poem's third stanza the Hebrew words *ganuz* and *mistarim* entice us. What is this secret, hidden treasure in the forest? The reader only wonders as the mystery is revealed to the two lovers alone. Suddenly, erotic images of butterflies fill the whole world. One of these butterflies becomes entangled in the braid of the young woman's hair. The use of the braid is particularly clever. At the end of the poem, Bialik describes their love as hanging by a hair. In addition, the braid itself flirts with the young man. It beckons to the him in this game of cat-and-mouse, and the young man hopes that he does not go unnoticed.

The poem's last stanza contains a reference to the two doves of grace from the Song of Songs. Not unlike the dove outside the young woman's window which Bialik depicted in the poem, "*Ha-Lailah Aravti* -- Tonight I Lay Stalking," he also describes his soul here as fluttering. However, rather than being in anguish, Bialik depicts the man's soul as existing in captivity, like in the Book of Isaiah. It is caught, like a butterfly, in this woman's braid. He hopes that the woman understands that she captured his soul like she did this butterfly. The reader might suspect, however, that she recognizes neither. He longs to share his deepest thoughts with her. Therefore, he requests that she immediately go with him in and enter the safety of the mysterious forest.

One of Bialik's most famous poems, which reveals a certain ambivalence toward women and sexuality is, "*Hachnisini Tahat K'nafech* -- Take Me Beneath Your Wing." Written in 1905, Bialik once again expresses the feelings of lost youth. In addition, Bialik merges religious motifs with a certain suggestive physicality.

הַכְנִיסִינִי תַּחַת כְּנָפֶךָ

הַכְנִיסִינִי תַּחַת כְּנָפֶךָ,
תֶּהְיִי לִי אֵם וְאָחוֹת,
וִיהִי חֵיקֵךְ מְקֻלָּס רֹאשִׁי,
קֶן־תְּמִלּוֹתַי הַנְּדָחוֹת.

וּבְעֵת רַחֲמִים, בֵּין־הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת,
שְׂחִי וַאֲנִי לָךְ סוֹד יְשׁוּרִי:
אוֹמְרִים, יֵשׁ בָּעוֹלָם נְעוּרִים –
הֵיכָן נְעוּרִי?

וְעוֹד רָז אֶחָד לָךְ אֶתְוַדֶּה:
נַפְשִׁי וִשְׂרָפָה בְּלַהֲבָה:
אוֹמְרִים, אַהֲבָה יֵשׁ בָּעוֹלָם –
מַה־זֹּאת אַהֲבָה?

הַכּוֹכָבִים רָשׁוּ אוֹתִי,
הָיָה חֲלוֹם – אַךְ גַּם הוּא עָבָר;

עַתָּה אֵין לִי כְּלוּם בָּעוֹלָם –
אֵין לִי דָּבָר.

הַכְנִיסִינִי תַּחַת כְּנָפֶךָ,
תֶּהְיִי לִי אֵם וְאָחוֹת,
וִיהִי חֵיקֵךְ מְקֻלָּס רֹאשִׁי,
קֶן־תְּמִלּוֹתַי הַנְּדָחוֹת.

Take Me Beneath Your Wing
(1905)

Take me beneath your wing,[69]
and be to me a mother and sister,
and let your bosom be a refuge for my head,
a nest for my unacceptable prayers.

And in the hour of mercy, the twilight hour,[70]
bend down and I will whisper in your ear the secret of my sufferings:[71]
They say there is YOUTH in the world-
Where is my youth?

There is one more secret that I will reveal to you:
my soul was consumed in its flame.[72]
They say there is LOVE in the world-
What is love?

The stars have deceived me,
there was a dream - but it too has passed;
Now I have nothing at all in the world -
I do not have a thing...[73]

Take me under your wing,
and be to me a mother and sister,
and let your bosom be a refuge for my head,
a nest for my unacceptable prayers.

Bialik's voice, as usual, employs biblical phrases in order to convey his feelings. The spiritually erotic image of the Hebrew word for wing, *kanaf*, for example, is a potential euphemism for the genitalia. This is based on the illusion to the, "person who seeks shelter," from the Book of Ruth, where the exchange between Boaz and Ruth in the book's second chapter has certain sexual connotations. It is in this story that she uncovers

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[69] Ruth 2:12.
[70] Literally, "between the suns." Known in Hasidic and Kabbalistic thought to be the time when God is especially attentive to prayers.
[71] Proverbs 25:9.
[72] Leviticus 6:23.
[73] Numbers 20:19.

his feet, which many scholars feel has explicit sexual implications. Various scholars add that the rabbinic notion of, "taking one under their wing," can signify either marriage or intercourse.

Bialik again draws heavily upon both biblical and rabbinic traditions. He makes another specific reference to the twilight hour. The phrase, "*bein hashemashot*," translated more literally as, "between the suns," is known in Hasidic and Kabbalistic thought to be the time when God is especially attentive to prayers. Judaism understands it as the hour of mercy. The character in the poem purposefully supplicates and discloses his pain at this safe time. He longs, almost expects that the woman to whom he prays will have mercy regarding his complaints about losing his innocence. The poet introduces the flame that consumes his soul in the third stanza, reiterating the idea of petition. This flame is a whole burnt offering, and thus causes the Hebrew reader to recall the priestly sacrifice.

Bialik describes the nothing that remains since losing his youth and love. He accuses the stars for deceiving him and destroying his destiny. The poem then concludes with a repetition of the first stanza, framing his request for salvation. Zemach points out that this poem again identifies the struggle that Bialik seems to express between love's loftier components and its more physical aspects.

In 1905 Bialik published another famous poem. Its title is, "*V'im Yishal Ha-Malakh* -- And If The Angel Should Ask."

וְאִם־יִשְׁאַל הַמַּלְאָךְ

בְּנִי, נִשְׁמָתְךָ אַיֵּהּ? –
„שׁוּט בָּעוֹלָם, בַּקְּשֶׁנָּה, מַלְאָכִי!
יֵשׁ בָּעוֹלָם כְּפָר שַׁאֲנָן, מֻקָּף חוֹמַת יְעָרִים,
וְלַכְּפָר רְקִיעַ תְּכֵלֶת, בְּלִי מְצָרִים רָקִיעַ,
וְלָרָקִיעַ הַתְּכֵלֶת בַּת־יְחִידָה בְּאֶמְצַע:
עָב יְחִידָה, לְבָנָה וּקְטַנָּה.
וּבְצָהֳרֵי יוֹם קַיִץ בָּדָד שִׂחֵק־שָׁם יֶלֶד,
יֶלֶד עָזוּב לְנַפְשׁוֹ, רַךְ וְיָחִיד וְחוֹלֵם –
וַאֲנִי הוּא הַיֶּלֶד, מַלְאָכִי.
פַּעַם אַחַת הִתְעַלֵּף כָּל־הָעוֹלָם בַּשֶּׁקֶט,
וּשְׁתֵּי עֵינֵי הַיֶּלֶד הַשָּׁמַיְמָה נִמְשְׁכוּ,
וַיִּרְאֶנָּה, הַיְחִידָה, הַזַּכָּה, הַבְּרוּרָה,
וְנַפְשׁוֹ יָצְאָה בִּרְאוֹתוֹ, כְּצֵאת יוֹנָה מִשּׁוֹבְכָהּ,
אֶל הֶעָב הַנֶּחְמָדָה."

– וְתָמוֹג? –

„גַּם־שֶׁמֶשׁ יֵשׁ בָּעוֹלָם, מַלְאָכִי!
אֶת־נִשְׁמָתִי הִצִּילָה קֶרֶן פָּז רַחֲמָנִיָּה,
וְעַל־כַּנְפֵי הַזֹּהַר יָמִים רַבִּים פִּזְּזָה
כְּצִפֹּרֶת לְבָנָה;
פַּעַם רָכְבָה בַּבֹּקֶר עַל־גַּב קֶרֶן הַזָּהָב,
הָלוֹךְ הָלְכָה לְבַקֵּשׁ פְּנִינַת טַל בֵּין הַדְּשָׁאִים,
דִּמְעָה זַכָּה וְתַמָּה אָז עַל־לְחָיֵי רַעֲדָה,
וַתִּזְדַּעְזַע הַקֶּרֶן וְנִשְׁמָתִי צָנָחָה –
וַתִּשְׁתַּקַּע בַּדִּמְעָה."

– וַתִּיבָשׁ? –

„לֹא, כִּי נָשְׁרָה עַל־דַּף גְּמָרָא קְדוֹשָׁה.
גְּמָרָא הָיְתָה לְזִקְנִי שְׂעִירַת גְּוִילִים וּמְעוּכָה,
וּבְכְרִיסָהּ – שְׁתֵּי שְׂעָרוֹת שֶׁל־זְקָנוֹ הַלָּבָן,
חוּטֵי צִיצִיּוֹת פְּסוּלוֹת שֶׁל־טַלִּיתוֹ הַקְּטַנָּה
וְסִמָּנִים שֶׁל־הַרְבֵּה טִפּוֹת חֵלֶב וְשַׁעֲוָה,
וּבַגְּמָרָא הַזֹּאת, בִּמְעֵי אוֹתִיּוֹת מֵתוֹת
בָּדָד פִּרְפְּרָה נִשְׁמָתִי."

– וַתֵּחָנֵק? –

„לֹא, פִּרְפְּרָה וַתְּשׁוֹרֵר, מַלְאָכִי!
בְּאוֹתִיּוֹת הַמֵּתוֹת שִׁירֵי חַיִּים הִקְרוּ,
וּבָאָרוֹן סִפְרֵי זְקֵנֵי מֵתֵי עוֹלָם נִזְדַּעְזְעוּ.
שְׁנַיִם הָיוּ הַשִּׁירִים: עַל־עָב קְטַנָּה וּבְהִירָה,
עֲלֵי קֶרֶן הַזָּהָב וַעֲלֵי דִּמְעָה מַזְהִירָה,
עֲלֵי צִיצִיּוֹת פְּסוּלוֹת וַעֲלֵי טִפּוֹת שֶׁל־שַׁעֲוָה –
אַךְ שִׁיר אֶחָד לֹא יָדְעָה – שִׁיר עֲלוּמִים וְאַהֲבָה.
וַתְּכַל לָצֵאת, וַתֶּהֱמֶה, וְלֹא־מָצְאָה תַנְחוּמִין,
וַתִּתְעַלֵּף עַד־כְּלוֹתָהּ, וַיְהִי צַר־לָהּ עַד־מָוֶת.
פַּעַם אַחַת פָּקַדְתִּי אֶת־גְּמָרָתִי הַבָּלָה –
וְהִנֵּה פָּרְחָה מִתּוֹכָהּ נִשְׁמָתִי.

וְעַדַיִן הִיא טָסָה וּמְשׁוֹטֶטֶת בָּעוֹלָם,
מְשׁוֹטֶטֶת וְתוֹעָה וְאֵינָהּ מוֹצֵאת תַּנְחוּמִין;
וּבַלֵּילוֹת הַצְּנוּעִים שֶׁבִּתְחִלַּת כָּל־חֹדֶשׁ,
בְּהִתְפַּלֵּל הָעוֹלָם עֲלֵי פְּגִימַת הַלְּבָנָה,
הִיא מִתְרַפֶּקֶת בִּכְמָהּ עֲלֵי שַׁעַר הָאַהֲבָה,
מִתְרַפֶּקֶת, דּוֹפֶקֶת וּבוֹכִיָּה בַּחֲשָׁאי,
וּמִתְפַּלְּלָה עַל־הָאַהֲבָה."

And If The Angel Should Ask
(1905)

Where is your soul, my child?
"Wander in the world, search for it, my angel!
The world has tranquil villages, surrounded by walls of forests,
and in each village, blue skies,[74]a firmament without limits,
and the blue skies have in their midst:
a single, solitary, white cloud.
And in the afternoon of a summer day, a child played there alone,
a child by himself, gentle, young, and dreaming-
and I was that child. my angel.
One time, all the world was frightened and silent,
and the two eyes of the child were drawn up to the heavens,
and he saw it, solitary, pure, and translucent,
and his soul went out of his body when he looked, like a dove from its nest,
to the lovely cloud."

Did it melt away?

"There is also a sun in the world, my angel.
Its merciful, golden ray saved my soul,
and upon the wings of radiance many days fluttered
like a white butterfly;
his soul rode in the morning upon the back of the golden ray,
it went out seeking a pearl of dew among the grass,
and a pure tear, and then upon my cheek it trembled.
And the ray glimmered and my soul slipped off,
and sank into the tear."

Did it dry up?

"No, rather it fell upon a page of holy *gemarah*.
The Talmud was tattered, bent parchment,
and in its belly - two white hairs of my grandfather's beard,
cords of the invalid *tzitzit* of his *tallit*
and signs of many fat droppings and candle wax,
and in this *gemarah*, entrails of dead letters
my soul, isolated, quivered."

Was it strangled?

[74]An interpretive translation of, "*Rakiah T'chelet.*"

"No, it fluttered and it sang, my angel!
Songs of life flowed forth in the dead letters,
and in the bookcase are books of my eternally dead grandfather.
The songs were different: about a white and bright cloud,
upon a golden ray and upon a glowing tear,
upon invalid *tzitzit* and upon drops of wax-
but one song the soul did not know- a song of youth and love.
And it finished going out, and sank and did not find consolation
and fainted and wilted and was painful until death.
One time I visited my warn out *gemarah* -
and behold a flower in the midst of my soul.

And still it flies and wanders in the world,
roaming and going astray, and not finding comfort;
and in the modest nights that begin every month,
when the world blesses the light of a defective moon,
it rested against a leaf upon the gate of love
clinging and clamoring and crying silently,
and praying for love.

In the above poetic masterpiece, Bialik writes again about lost youth, and transformation. He reveals to his readers that as a child his soul was lost. At first he draws upon the familiar images of the dove and the pure, white cloud against the backdrop of a blue sky. In the second stanza, the soul becomes caught in a golden ray of the sun, and transformed into a teardrop. His soul is then changes again as the tear falls onto a page of the Talmud, only to live again, miraculously rejuvenated in its dead letters. In the end, his soul still wanders the world, searching for consolation and love.

In the beginning of the poem Bialik describes the tranquil village of his youth as surrounded by a forest. He writes of endless blue skies against the backdrop of which he introduces the purity of a single white cloud. He reveals to his readers that his soul fled his body, flying like a dove, in order to reach the cloud. Perhaps this desire to reach the

heavens was motivated by a need to see his father so that he might feel like a child once again.

In contrast to the pure, white cloud, Bialik opens the second stanza with the light of the sun. Sunshine here represents salvation, as his soul rides upon its golden rays. As is typical with Bialik, he introduces the erotic images of light and a butterfly. In the poem, "*Shirati* -- My Song," Bialik wrote about his mother's tear that dropped into the dough that she was kneading. Here, however, the tear about which he writes carries his soul, and slips of his cheek onto a page of Talmud.

The poem is rather autobiographical. Bialik, having experienced the inner world of the yeshiva, writes here, as he does so frequently, about the ambivalence he felt towards the process of Talmudic study. On the one hand he views it as moribund and decadent, but on the other hand he still respects its place in the Jewish tradition. In many of his poems it is clear that he, himself was happy to have abandoned this way of life. Whether he could not hack it or just disliked it, at the very least he respected it. In addition, it is out of the dead letters of the *gemarah* that he is able to generate a great deal of the material for his poetry. This incurable ambivalence is especially prevalent in the above poem, as well as in the poem, "*Ha-Matmid* -- The Talmud Student."

Bialik explicitly mentions his grandfather in the poem, "*V'im Yishal Ha-Malakh* -- And If The Angel Should Ask." He thus recalls a period in his life which he feels was especially difficult for him. He describes the page of Talmud as tattered and bent, and the *tzitzit* of his *tallit* as invalid. The same is true of the moon. Everyone holds their breath for the moon to come up pristine so that they will bless it, but in this poem it arises

defective. Thus Bialik conveys that it is, perhaps, the entire way of life that Talmud study requires which is outdated. And it is, in fact, in the *gemarah* that his soul is trapped and quivers.

The poem's second to last stanza then provides us with a jarring juxtaposition. Suddenly his soul flutters and sings out of the very same page of Talmud. Is it the case that it lives again when people study the dead letters of the *gemarah*? Small bright clouds, golden beams of sunshine, damaged fringes and drops of wax all come alive when he opens the worn, faded book. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that his soul escaped when the book was opened, just as Bialik, himself, escaped life in yeshiva. Why is it that his soul seems to be existing in an eternal exile? Beyond its national implications, it is clear that his soul is roaming and searching for what it was deprived of in its childhood. It longs still for youth and love.

One of the most notable poems that Bialik wrote around this time in his life was his prose- poem, "*Megillat Ha-Esh* -- The Scroll of Fire." He composed the Scroll in the summer of 1905, shortly after he witnessed the results of the mutiny of the *Potemkin* and its subsequent burning in the port of Odessa. The fire had a profound impact on Bialik. In this epic work, he gave legendary, memorable expression to the tension between erotic fulfillment and theological-national redemption. As Biale notes:

> Bialik vacillated between the traditional God of his childhood and the secular nationalist revolt of his adolescence, as well as between sexual renunciation and erotic desire.[75]

[75] Biale, David. *Eros and The Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. P. 174.

The scroll is indeed complex, expressing both national and personal traumas. It remains today, as in the past, the focus of much literary attention and analysis.

Yonatan Ratosh offered a pioneering interpretation regarding a very personal side of the poet in his article, "The Poetry of Foreign Love by Bialik."[76] The article appears in complete translation at the end of this paper. In it Ratosh analyzed Bialik's poetry, paying close attention specifically to, "*Megillat Ha-Esh* -- The Scroll of Fire." He, more than most other scholars, supports the notion that various poems within the corpus of Bialik's work are not just of a nationalistic slant, but rather reveal deeper, more intimate characteristics behind the man. His argument, which starts with an analysis of the Scroll itself suggests that Bialik intended at first only to write "*Megillat Ha-Esh*" with the collective Jewish people in mind. However, he unconsciously revealed a great deal about his life experience, and himself. David Aberbach concurs, describing such poems as the work of, "a deeply sensitive and committed artist, full of pain and longing..."[77]

In his book, *Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Narratives by Twentieth-Century Hebrew Writers*, David Jacobson dedicates an entire chapter to Bialik. In the section entitled, "The Creative Restoration of Legends: Chaim Nachman Bialik," Jacobson suggests that Bialik submitted Hebrew legends to a process of restoration. In this process he allowed them to convey the meaning of contemporary Jewish experience as well. Jacobson suggests that this process of creative restoration involved a synthesis of images from the poet's own personal experience and from the legends he retold.

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[76] For a complete translation, see the Appendix.
[77] Aberbach, David. *Bialik*. New York: Grove Press, 1988. P. 8

> ...Bialik referred to two personal experiences, one as a child and one as an adult, which played a role in the genesis of "Megillat ha'esh."...Out of Bialik's synthesis of the images of fire, water, dryness, and barrenness, taken from his personal experiences and from ancient legends, emerged "Megillat ha'esh" as a myth of modern Jewish existence. In this myth, Bialik sought to convey to his readers his understanding of the crises of the time.[78]

The two essential experiences of which Jacobson writes were the fires he witnessed as a child, and in the port of Odessa. Jacobson speculates that Bialik retold the legends of the hidden fire and the captives for personal as well as national reasons. However, while he understands the personal reasons as a reaction to a psychological crisis, he does not extend his analysis far enough into the personal. He completely omits any mention of Zemach's study, and seems to revert back to the previous approach of a nationalistic over personal interpretation.

In contrast, Ratosh follows a much more personal approach to the understanding of this epic poem. He identifies the protagonist in the piece, "a clear-eyed lad," as the young Bialik. This assumption leads Ratosh to infer that, the lad, whose prophetic quest in the poem is represented by his search for the remains of the fire of the altar, is actually the prophetic voice of Bialik, himself. He then points to what he considers as a major tension in the poem: the lad's goal of finding and caring for the holy fire, compounded by the feeling of romantic love which he now possesses for a young woman. The young woman, according to Ratosh, stands for Eros, and the story thus portrays the love that Bialik had for someone that never reached its fulfillment. Evidence for such a person is

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[78] Jacobson, David. *Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives by Twentieth-Century Hebrew Writers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. P. 46.

unattainable. However, the author Moshe Shamir did publish an article about the possibility that Bialik had an affair. He even went so far as to mention a woman's name: Ira Yan. Only very recently Zivah Shamir published an entire book on the Ira Yan episode building on research by Moshe Shamir, Nurit Govrim, and others. I was unable to deal with Zivah Shamir's volume.

Ratosh puts forth the notion that the young lad actually symbolizes naiveté. According to Ratosh, "the clear-eyed youth," and, "the man with angry eyebrows," are two sides of the same person. Hence the lad's transformation into, "the man with angry eyebrows," delineates the poet Bialik's own growth toward cynicism. Now a cynic, the protagonist in the poem detests innocence. Ratosh writes, "The whole essence of the Scroll of Fire is how the young lad with clear eyes has changed into a man with angry eyebrows."[79] Thus the poem is possibly speaking about Bialik's cynical disappointment over his fate, over a destiny or vocation that has misled or frustrated him. In addition, it also pronounces that the protagonist's youth is now lost to him. Many of these themes are evident in Bialik's individual short poems dealing with love. It is unclear whether it is Bialik's ideals or dreams or some other great cause that once helped give purpose to his life and that have now disappeared. It is interesting that the Hebrew term that Ratosh employs in his article is "*ha-kokhave Hayyav*." The term calls to mind Bialik's famous line, "the stars have fooled -- *ha-kokhavim rimmuoti*," which suggests that for Bialik and

[79] Ratosh, Yonatan. "The Poetry of Foreign Love by Bialik," as it appears in Gershon Shaked, ed., *Bialik, Yetsirato le-Sugehah bi-Re'i ha-Biqqoret*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974. P. 262.

perhaps one or more of his lovers or potential loves fate has rendered them, as it were, "star-crossed."

Ratosh supports his overall argument by citing various other poems by Bialik. In poems such as, "*Ha-Enayim Ha-R'evot* -- Those Hungry Eyes," cited and translated above, Ratosh speculates that Bialik had some sort of encounter, perhaps sexual, with a specific woman. He further articulates that the meeting was for some reason, a strange or alien thing, a "*ahavah zarah*," that almost recalls the "*esh zarah*" of the biblical story of Nadav and Avihu. Ratosh's theory of Bialik's obsession has little evidence to support it, as one cannot conclude from his poetry alone that Bialik had extra-marital affairs. Still, there remains a hypothesis that Bialik had a relationship with non-Jewish women, or at least that he wanted to, and some evidence exists in his poetry and short stories.

David Biale offers another interpretation of The Scroll in his book, *Eros and the Jews*. He describes the narrator of The Scroll as being, "trapped between the 'fire of love' and the 'fire of God,'" thus capturing the dilemma of that generation.

> How could the desire for erotic fulfillment be reconciled with the demands of the religious tradition and national goals? If, as appears to be the case, the love of which the poet speaks is pagan and the beloved woman a non-Jew, how can Eros be reconciled with Jewish allegiance?[80]

For Biale, the poem's ending testifies to the fact that unconsummated love is inseparable from the experience of exile, as both represent dilemmas of powerlessness for the Jewish people.

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[80] Biale, David. *Eros and The Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. P. 174.

Isaiah Rabinovich, in his book, *Major Trends in Modern Hebrew Fiction*, asks the following question:

> Who can tell what Ahad Haam feared more- the "hidden light" of creation that might dazzle him or the gloomy darkness before creation? Bialik certainly was afraid and he tells us specifically that he feared the "glowering man," the "areas of desolation," and the "deep black waters," as he describes them in his Scroll of Fire and other poems.[81]

It is Rabinovich's understanding that Bialik shied away from the apocalyptic myths bursting through his poem, and took refuge in a nationalism that offered an intellectual outlet for this, "man of the soil."[82] Finally, Rabinovich points out that in Bialik's poem "City of Slaughter" the poet conveys in a similar fashion the despair that lies beyond grief. He places the reader on the brink of an abyss in the world of the Jew.[83]

Some scholars, such as Aberbach, understand The Scroll to be reminiscent of Hasidic teachings. The Scroll contains both good and evil since they are inseparably bound up with one another.[84] Yet what is more likely is that there exists a polarity between two types of love. Zemach identifies the first of these poles as a platonic love, and the second as a more sexual or erotic love. Specific motifs express this in The Scroll, many of which are prominent in other works by Bialik. Several of his poems, as evidenced above, contain the presence of a pure, white cloud. Here, the longing for a pure cloud, rays of light, and the fluttering bird all come to represent the release of sexual powers.

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[81] Rabinovich, Isaiah. *Major Trends in Modern Hebrew Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. P. 128.
[82] Ibid., Pps. 128-9.
[83] Ibid., P. 161.
[84] Aberbach, David. *Bialik*. New York: Grove Press, 1988. P. 25.

(1906-1909)

Bialik continued writing poetry about love throughout the early 1900's, yet the themes about which he wrote remained somewhat the same. His work reveals a great deal of development, yet often expresses feelings of pain and abandonment like before. Bialik reveals his continuing feelings of abandonment in the poem, "*Holechet At Me-immi* -- You Are Leaving Me," written in 1907, a couple of years after The Scroll.

הוֹלֶכֶת אַתְּ מֵעִמִּי

הוֹלֶכֶת אַתְּ מֵעִמִּי – לְכִי לְשָׁלוֹם
וִיהִי רְצוֹנֵךְ לְבַדּוֹ נֵר לִנְתִיבֵךְ,
וּמִצְאִי אֶת־הַשַּׁלְוָה בַּאֲשֶׁר תִּהְיִי.
אֲנִי? אַל־תִּתְּנִי לֵב – אִתִּי נִלְמֹד:
כָּל־עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָף בְּצֵאתוֹ וּבְבֹאוֹ
וְכוֹכְבֵי־אֵל לֹא־נִלְאוּ עוֹד מַרְמֹז לִי –
עוֹד לֹא יָרַדְתִּי מִכָּל־נְכָסַי
וּמַעְיַן תַּנְחוּמוֹתַי עוֹד לֹא־דָלָל.
רְאִי, חָסַרְתִּי אוֹתָךְ – אַךְ עֲדַיִן
לִי נִשְׁאַר רָב: לִי יֵשׁ עוֹד עוֹלָם מָלֵא,
הַיָּפֶה כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא בִּירַק אֲבִיבָיו,
בְּזָהַב סוֹף קֵיצָיו וּבְלַבְנוּנִית חֳרָפָיו;
וְלֵב עוֹד לִי – דְּבִיר חָזוֹן, קַן־הַחֲלוֹמוֹת,
וּכְאַבְנֵי עָצוּר שָׁם, יְגוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ,
וּמַלְאָךְ טָהוֹר עִמִּי – דְּמוּת דְּיוֹקְנֵךְ,
הַחוֹפֵף עוֹד כְּחֶסֶד אֵל עַל־רֹאשִׁי
וְלוֹחֵשׁ בְּרָכָה, רוֹתֵת וּמִתְאַפֵּק
כְּדִמְעַת אֵם חֲשָׁאִית עַל נֵר שַׁבָּת
בְּדִמְמַת הַקְּדֻשָּׁה הַשַּׁאֲנַנָּה,
וּכְאוֹתוֹ כּוֹכָב חָרֵד שָׁם בַּמָּרוֹם,
שֶׁמֵּצִיץ עוֹד עָלַי בְּעַיִן יָפָה
וּמוֹשִׁיט לִי בַחֹשֶׁךְ שַׁרְבִיט זְהָבוֹ.

וַאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי,
עוֹד יִפְשְׁטוּ עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ כֻּלָּהּ
בִּירִיעַת תְּכֵלְתָּם הַמְשֻׁבֶּצֶת זָהָב

כְּכוּשִׁיּוֹת הַשְּׁחֹרוֹת – לֵילֵי קַיִץ,
מְתוּקֵי לֵילוֹת, קוֹדְחִים וּמַחֲרִישִׁים
מְעֻלְּפֵי שְׁחוֹר וּכְלִילֵי הַכּוֹכָבִים,
כָּל־כּוֹכָב רִמּוֹן זָהָב, רִמּוֹן זָהָב;
וְרִנַּת הִרְהוּרֵי חֵטְא וִינַעַת חֶמְדָּה
בְּחֵיק הַלַּיְלָה תִּרְבַּץ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ;
וּפִתְאֹם תָּקוּם דְּמָמָה גְדוֹלָה, רַבָּה,
וָרֶטֶט חֲשַׁק יַחֲלֹף כָּל־הָעוֹלָם,
וְנִעֲרוּ כוֹכָבִים שְׁפָעוֹת שְׁפָעוֹת,
וְנִתְּכוּ הֵמָּה וּמִכְתוֹתָם אַרְצָה
כִּנְפֹל שְׁלַל עֲלֵי זָהָב בַּשַּׁלֶּכֶת;
וּקְלוּיֵי תַאֲוָה וַאֲכוּלֵי חֵשֶׁק
אִישׁ אִישׁ בִּרְעָבוֹ וּבִצְמָאוֹ יֵצֵא,
יְגַשֵּׁשׁ קִיר כְּעִוֵּר, יְחַבֵּק אֶבֶן,
יִתְחַבֵּט אַרְצָה, יְחַל עַל־גַּחוֹנוֹ,
לְלַקֵּט רְסִיס פָּז אֶחָד, פֵּרוּר אֶחָד
מִמָּה שֶׁהִשְׁלִיךְ לוֹ מֵעַל כּוֹכָבוֹ
וְלִמְצֹא מְלֹא כַף אַהֲבָה, קֹרְטוֹב אֹשֶׁר –
בְּשָׁעָה זוֹ אִם־יִתְקָפֵךְ גַּעְגּוּעִים,
וְתוֹהָה וַעֲיֵפָה תָּתַע עֵינֵךְ
וּתְשׁוֹטֵט חֶדְלַת תִּקְוָה בָּעֲרָפֶל,
וְנַפְשֵׁךְ תֵּצֵא לֵאלֹהִים וְלָאֹשֶׁר –
כְּמוֹתִי שְׂאִי עֵינַיִךְ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה
וְלִמְדִי־נָא מֵהֶם אֶת־לִבֵּךְ שַׁלְוָה;
רְאִי, כָּאֵלֶּה וְכָאֵלֶּה יֹאבֵדוּ
כּוֹכָבִים מִדֵּי לַיְלָה לַשָּׁמַיִם –
וְהֵם בְּעָשְׁרָם עוֹמְדִים וּבְשַׁלְוָתָם,
וְאֵיתָם חָשִׁים כְּלָל בַּאֲבֵדָתָם,
וּכְמוֹ לֹא־נִגְרַע כְּלוּם מִכָּל־זְהָבָם.

You Are Leaving Me
(1907)

You are leaving me - go in peace.[85]
Let your will alone light your way
and find serenity wherever you end up.
As for me? Don't pay attention -[86]I am not lonely:
as long as the sun is beautiful in its rising and setting,
God's stars have not tired twinkling to me-
I have not yet forfeited all my emotions,
and the wellspring of my consolations has not yet depleted.
Look, I miss you - but still
much remains for me: I still have the whole wide world,
which is beautiful in and of itself,[87]
like the greenness of its springtimes,
with the gold of the end of its summers,
and with the whiteness of its winters;
and I still have my heart - the inner sanctity of vision, the nest of dreams,
and my pain is contained there,
this sacred sorrow,
and a pure angel is with me - the image of you
that finds still his head like divine grace,
and whispers a blessing,
trembling like a mother's secret tear holding back over the Sabbath candle,
in the quietude of serene holiness,
and like a star trembling there in the heights,
that still peers at me with a pretty eye
and extends to me in the darkness its golden scepter.

And I know,
the summer nights will still spread over the earth
your canvas of purple interlaced with gold
like dark Ethiopian women - summer nights,
the sweetest of nights, feverish and silent
cloaked in black and in crowns of stars
every star - a golden pomegranate,[88] a golden pomegranate;
and satiated with sinful thoughts and fatigued from desire,
the entire earth lies in the bosom of the night;
and suddenly a vast stillness arises,[89]

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[85] I Samuel 1:17.
[86] Literally, "don't give heart..."
[87] Poetic license taken in translation.
[88] Exodus 28:20.
[89] Psalm 107:29.

and a quiver of lust passes over the entire world
and a plenitude of falling stars bestir themselves.
And they and their fragments are poured down to the earth
like the falling of variegated golden leaves in autumn;[90]
and roasted with lust and devoured by passion.
Each man in his hunger and in his thirst will go out,
and will grope a wall like a blind person,[91] and will embrace a stone,[92]
he will thrash about onto the ground, he will crawl upon his belly,[93]
to collect one golden fragment, one golden fragment
from what his star on high threw down to him
and to find a handful of love,[94] full, one scintilla of happiness -
and in this hour, if longings will seize you
and your eye, yearning and tired
should stray and roam about
and bereft of hope in the dark mist,
and if your soul should pine for God and happiness -
then, like me raise your eyes[95] to the heavens
and instruct your heart to learn from their example:
see, like these many stars that are lost to the heavens each night -
they persist in their sense of wealth and in their serenity,
and they do not at all feel their loss,
and it is as if nothing has been diminished from all their goldness.

The question that immediately comes to mind: is the poem written for Ira Yan? One can only guess. Clearly, Bialik feels bereft. Still, at the very beginning of the poem he bids his lover farewell using the same, sincere phrase that Eli says to Hannah in the First Book of Samuel: "*L'chi L'shalom* -- Go in peace." He tells the woman not to worry about him, and that he can get along without her. He claims that he is not lonely, but rather takes comfort in the richness of the universe that remains. He mentions three of the world's four seasons, his dreams, and the woman's image as still existing for him. He then

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[90] The term more literally means Fall.
[91] Isaiah 59:10.
[92] Job 24:8.
[93] Genesis 3:14.
[94] Ecclesiastes 4:6.
[95] Isaiah 51:6.

describes a pure angel who whispers to him a blessing. What is the blessing? The serene holiness that exists when a mother holds back a tear while blessing over the Sabbath candles, and/or the twinkle of God's stars as they wink to him. Perhaps, it is her memory.

In the second stanza of the poem, Bialik writes about fall, the last of the four seasons. Perhaps this is an affirmation of the fact that the relationship is dying. Yet in the same stanza it is as if the whole earth is having a sexual orgy, and then afterward feels exhausted. Bialik writes of, "a plenitude of falling stars," and compares them to the falling of leaves in autumn. The whole world seems to lust and feel dissatisfied.

Bialik makes several significant biblical references in the second stanza. In doing so he comments specifically on human desire and lust. Isaiah's chastisement of the people of Israel is one such reference. Isaiah says, "We grope for the wall like the blind and we grope as if we had no eyes..." Bialik uses this phrase in order to describe human appetites. He then introduces the phrase, "*yachbok aven* -- embrace a stone," from the Book of Job. What does it mean to embrace a stone? Humans desire things of substance. Yet while a rock is a very real object, it is also empty, sharp, and unfeeling. The phrase is also a play on words as there are two words that exist for rock. Several texts in the Jewish tradition employ the Hebrew word *tzur* as a euphemism for God. Bialik, however, uses the term *even*, its synonym. Rocks are inanimate articles that offer little in return. Bialik then makes a reference to the serpent from Genesis, a symbol about which he dedicated an entire poem; "*Havah vehanahash* -- Eve and the Serpent." Jewish literature portrays the serpent as an evil beast, as the Midrash and Kabbalah develop the image's negative sexual

import.[96] Here, too, it serves little purpose other than to comment negatively on the human characteristics of desire and lust. Yet another phrase, "*kaf ahavah* -- a handful of love," from Ecclesiastes contrasts within that book with, "two handfuls of travail." Bialik uses the phrase to speak of a desire of another type, happiness.

The final portion of the poem seems to convey advice. It advises the woman who has left him to do the same thing that he does when he feels lost and tired. Searching for happiness he lifts his eyes, like Abraham, to the heavens. He then tells his heart to learn from the stars who do not feel their loss.

Bialik, in 1907, also published the poem, "*Lintivech Hane'lam* -- Along Your Hidden Path." In it the theme of abandonment is again apparent.

[96] Bar Yosef, Hamutal. "The Influence of Decadence on Bialik's Concept of Femininity," in Naomi Sokoloff, Ann Lapidus Lerner and Anita Norich eds., *Gender and Text in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. P. 151.

לְנָתִיבֵךְ הַנֶּעְלָם

לְנָתִיבֵךְ הַנֶּעְלָם כַּסּוּפָה זְנַקְתְּ
וַתִּקְרְצִי מִתְאֹם בֵּית־כְּלָאֵךְ,
וּמִסְּבִיבוֹת אֲהֳלִי לָנָצוּת מָחַקְתְּ
אֶת־עִקְּבוֹת פְּעָמַיִךְ וְצִלֵּךְ;
בְּמִשְׁטַת בָּהָלָה לַדָּרֶךְ יָצָאת,
וּבְצֵאתֵךְ – עִם צְרוֹרֵךְ לַמֶּרְחָק נָשָׂאת
אֶת־מְצָהֳלוֹת צְחוֹקֵךְ – אֶת־פַּעֲמוֹן זְהָבֵךְ,
אֶת־לַהֲבוֹת גִּילֵךְ וּמְדוּרוֹת לְבָבֵךְ:
אַךְ אַחַת נָשָׂית: בִּרְכַּת שְׁלוֹמִי וּשְׁלוֹמֵךְ.

וּבְחָפְזֵךְ וְתָשִׁי
בְּזָוִית קִשּׁוֹנֵךְ גַּם נַעַל שֶׁל מֶשִׁי,
וַעַל אָדָן הַחַלּוֹן – אֲגֻדַּת חֲבַצְּלוֹתַי
וְצְרוֹר חֲלוֹמוֹתַי
וְאוֹתִי – – –

בַּאֲשֶׁר אַתְּ שָׁם – הֲיֵי בְּרוּכָה מִמְּקוֹמֵךְ!
עָמֵךְ אָנֹכִי בְּסַעֲרָה, אֲחוֹתִי!
וְאִם אַתְּ עֲזוּז סַעַר וַאֲנִי כְּבַד חֲלוֹמוֹת –
עַד רֹאשׁ גִּבְעוֹת עוֹלָם וְעַד יַרְכְּתֵי תְהוֹמוֹת
יְרַדְפֵךְ יְגוֹן כָּל־לֵילוֹתַי וְיָמַי:
וְתִשְׂא אֲבָרוֹתַיִךְ – וְאַתְּ גַּם לֹא תִרְאִי –
אָנֹכִי, עֲנַן זַעַף קוֹדֵר, עָרִירִי,
עַל אֲשֶׁר תָּשׂוּטִי אֲשָׁרַךְ פְּעָמַי,
וּבְפָרְשִׂי מִמְּרוֹמַי, וּבַאֲשֶׁר אָבֹאָה,
צַל מָעוֹר וְשָׁאָה –
אֲפַלַּח לֵב־עוֹלָם בְּבָרָקִי וּרְעָמַי
וְאַחֲרֵהוּ בְּנָשָׁמַי
וּבְשִׁירִי.

Along Your Hidden Path
(1907)

Along your hidden path you jumped out like a storm
and you suddenly broke out of your jail,
and from all around my tent[97] you erased forever
the traces of your steps and your shadow;
in a hasty flight you went on your way,[98]
and as you departed - along with your luggage,
you carried far way your delightful laugh- the ring of a golden bell,[99]
your infectious joy and the intensive flame of your heart;
but you forgot something: a proper farewell for the two of us. [100]

And in your haste, you also forgot in the corner of your room a silk shoe,
and on the windowsill - the bouquet of lilies and my bundle of dreams,
and me---

Wherever you are[101] - accept my blessing in that place![102]
I am with you in a storm,[103] my lover!
And if you are a mighty storm and I am weighed down by dreams -
as far as the peaks of everlasting hills[104] to the farthest reaches of the deep
the grief of all my days and nights will pursue you;
and as lofty as your wings have carried you - and although you do not see -
I, a gloomy, solitary, anger filled cloud,
I will make my way to wherever you roam,
and in spreading from way up high, wherever I go
a shadow of fear and calamity -
I will pierce the heart of the world with my lightening and thunder
and I will give life to the earth with my rains,
and with my poems.

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[97] Job 19:12.
[98] Judges 19:27.
[99] Exodus 28:34.
[100] Psalm 29:11.
[101] Genesis 21:17.
[102] Ezekiel 3:12.
[103] Psalm 91:15.
[104] Genesis 49:26.

Not unlike in the poem, "*Holechet At Me-immi* --You Are Leaving Me," the reader of this poem can only wonder why the woman has left. However, in contrast to that poem, the story contained in these verses begins earlier in their relationship. It includes an explosion of sorts. We learn right away that this woman bursts onto the scene of this man's life like a sudden storm. Bialik does not begin this story with good-bye wishes of peace and well-being. Such wishes do not appear until the third and final stanza. Instead, Bialik begins here with a description of the woman as breaking out of her prison, and subsequently surrounding his tent. This phrase about his tent is from the Book of Job. It includes a description of Job's foes coming together to rise up against him.

The woman in this poem wants to completely annihilate her presence from his memory. She consciously erases her steps, and even her shadow disappears. She, however, fails in this attempt. The memory of her laughter haunts him. He misses her joy and her love, and chastises her for leaving without saying good-bye. Leaving in such haste, he points out that, in a rather Cinderella fashion, she left behind one shoe. She also forgot the flowers that he brought her. In the final powerful phrase of the second stanza, the man also reveals that she also forgot all about his dreams, and the man, himself.

It is not until the final stanza that he finally wishes her well. Yet, he vows to pursue her like a stormy cloud. The reader cannot help recalling the storm from the first stanza. Here, however, Bialik employs the Hebrew phrase, "*Immach anochi bis'arah* -- I will be with you in a storm." The phrasing is purposefully similar to the Hebrew found in Psalm 91:15, "*Immo anochi b'tzarah* -- I will be with him in trouble," which refers to the *Shechinah*. The man is claiming that he will be with her not just in a storm, but in her

sorrow. Bialik's use of the verse implies then, that like God, who through the immediacy of the *shechinah* is with humanity wherever they are, the man too will be with this woman wherever she is. He intends to follow her to all ends of the earth.

Inevitably, break-ups create agitation, not unlike a storm itself. Still, we cannot know if she is oblivious to his suffering or not. Bialik writes here that she cannot see, but that is also because he has become a cloud. One must give credit to Bialik for so thoroughly carrying this metaphor throughout the corpus of his work. In this poem, however, the cloud, while solitary, is not white and pure. Rather it is gloomy and full of anger. It spreads fear with its shadow wherever it flies. The shadow, we recall, was one of the elements the woman sought to erase from his world in the first stanza. Thus this angry rain-cloud, while frightening the world with its thunder and lightning, replaces that which the woman has erased. For while clouds sometimes frighten people, they also give life to the world with rain, as the poet gives life with poetry.

Bialik, in 1908, published three interesting poems about love. The poem, "*Lo Vayom V'lo VaLailah* -- Not by Day and Not by Night," is a sweet and endearing poetic creation in the style of a folk song. However, it challenges the prevailing methods of courting at the time. The appeal of the young woman at the conclusion of the poem acts as a complaint against marriages arranged by a woman's father.

לֹא בַיּוֹם וְלֹא בַלַּיְלָה

לֹא בַיּוֹם וְלֹא בַלַּיְלָה –
חָרַשׁ אַצָּא לִי, אֲמַיְלָה:

לֹא בָהָר וְלֹא בַבִּקְעָה –
שָׁפָה עוֹמְדָה שָׁם עַתִּיקָה.

וְהַשָּׁפָה פּוֹתְרָה חִידוֹת
וּמַגִּידָה הֵיא עֲתִידוֹת.

אֶת־הַשָּׁפָה אֶשְׁאַל אֲנִי:
מִי וָמִי יְהִי חָתָנִי?

וּמַאַיִן יָבֹא, שָׁפָה –
הֲמִפּוֹלִין אִם מִלִּיטָאז

הַבְּטֶרֶכְבָּה יַעֲבֹר שְׁבִילוֹ,
אִם בְּמַקְלוֹ וּבְתַרְמִילוֹז

וּמַה־יָּבִיא לִי שְׁלוּמִים:
חֲרוּזֵי טְנִינִים אִם אַלְוְמִיסז

וּמַה־תָּאֳרוֹ: צַח אִם־שָׁחֹרז
אַלְמֶן הוּא אִם־עוֹדוֹ בָּחוּרז

שָׁמָּא זָקֵן, שָׁפָה טוֹבָה,
אֲז לֹא אֶשְׁמַע, אֲז לֹא אֹבָה.

אֹמַר לְאָבִי: הֲמִיתֵנִי –
וּבְיַד זָקֵן אַל תִּתְּנֵנִי!

לְרַגְלָיו אֶפֹּל וְאֶשָּׁקֵן:
אַךְ לֹא זָקֵן, אַךְ לֹא זָקֵן!

Not by Day and Not by Night
(1908)

Not by day and not by night-
secretly, I alone went walking;

Not on a mountain and not in a valley-
an ancient acacia stands there.

And the acacia solves riddles
it tells my fortunes.

I asked the acacia:
Who will be my groom?

And from where will he come, acacia
from Poland or Lithuania?

Will he cross the road on a chariot
or on foot with only his staff and knapsack?

And what gifts will he bring me
strings of pearls or corral;

And what is his complexion:[105] fair or dark?
Is he a widow or still a young man?

Perhaps an old man, oh good acacia
I will not obey, I will not submit.[106]

I will say to my father: kill me
Don't give me an old man!

I will fall to the ground and I will beg:[107]
Not an old man, not an old man!

---

[105] "*umah ta'aro*," is translated more literally as, "what surrounds him."
[106] I Kings 20:8.
[107] I Samuel 25:24.

Each of the above poem's lines ends in a rhyme. If possible, please note that in the Hebrew on the previous page. In addition, my translation does not capture the poem's meter. In the Jewish tradition, acacia trees solve riddles involving the mysteries of the heart. Therefore, the female character in the poem asks the tree who her lover will be. She wants to know all about him: What gifts will her lover bear? What will his skin coloration be? Most importantly, what will be his age? It is clear in the poem's final stanzas that she does not want to marry an old man. Bialik employs verses from the First Book of Kings and the First Book of Samuel to emphasize this.

In the next one of the three 1908 poems translated and analyzed here, the main character entices a young woman to come and welcome the onset of spring with him. In this, one of Bialik's more healthy poetic creations, even the poem's title indicates his intentions "*Kumi Tz'i* -- Come Let's Go Out..."

קוּמִי צְאִי

קוּמִי צְאִי, אֲחוֹתִי כַלָּה,
קוּמִי צְאִי, קוּמִי צְאִי –
בְּשׂוֹרַת אָבִיב לָךְ הֵבֵאתִי:
מֵאֲחוֹרֵי גֶדֶר גַּי
נִרְאָה צִיץ, נִרְאָה צִיץ,
נִשְׁמַע קוֹל הַדְּרוֹר עַל־בֵּיתִי.

מִן־הַבֹּקֶר שׁוֹמְרִים סִפֵּךְ
זַהֲרֵי־גִיל, זָהֲרֵי־גִיל,
נוֹשְׁקִים מְזוּזוֹת פְּתָחָיִךְ;
צְאִי אֲלֵיהֶם, תַּמָּה, בָּרָה,
וּשְׁטָפוּךְ וְחִדְּשׁוּךְ,
וְהִקְרִינוּ אֶת עֵינָיִךְ.

עָבַר חֶסֶד־אֵל בָּאָרֶץ
עַל־כְּנַף־אוֹר, עַל־כְּנַף־אוֹר –
וּבִפְלָגִים נָפְלָה רִנָּה:
אָבִיב בָּא! אָבִיב בָּא!
לִבְלְבוּ גַּם הָעֵצִים,
הַדֻּבְדְּבָנִיָּה הִלְבִּינָה.

גַּם־כְּלַב שָׁב וַיְחִי
פֶּרַח דּוֹדַי, נָתַן רֵיחוֹ –
צְאִי בָּרְכֵיהוּ בַּאֲבִיבֵךְ;
אַף אֲנִי, אַף אֲנִי
אֶת־אֲבִיבִי בָּךְ אַשְׁכִּיחָה
וַאֲבָרְכֵךְ וַאֲנִיבֵךְ.

עוֹטָה אוֹר, שִׂמְלַת צָחוֹר,
וּבְצַמָּתֵךְ קְשׁוּר תְּכֵלֶת,
צְאִי אֵלַי כְּחֶזְיוֹן רוּחִי!

תְּהַרְתְּ, וְשָׂחַקְתְּ,
וִיהִי שְׂחוֹקֵךְ מְלֵא חֵן,
וִיהִי רֵיחֵךְ כַּתַּפּוּחַ.

יַחְדָּו נִפְלֶה אֶל הַשָּׂדֶה
וְאֶל הָהָר וְאֶל הַגָּיְא,
וַאֲלַקְּטָה שָׁם זִכְרִיּוֹת;
אָסֹף אֶאֱסֹף פְּנִינֵי־טָל,
פְּנִינֵי־טָל –
אֶל צַוָּארֵךְ מַרְגָּלִיּוֹת.

אָסֹף אֶאֱסֹף קַרְנֵי אוֹר,
קַרְנֵי אוֹר,
וַאֲלַקְּטָה בֵּין שׁוֹשַׁנִּים;
אֶעֱנֹד מִצְחֵךְ צִיצֵי זִיו,
צְפִירוֹת זָהָב, זֵרֵי פָז,
וְאֶקְשֹׁר לְרֹאשֵׁךְ כְּתָרִים קְטַנִּים.

יַחְדָּו נֵרֵד אֶל הַמַּעְיָן,
וְכָמוֹךְ, מָלֵא רֹךְ,
עָלָיו, בָּהִיר וְאַוְרִירִי,
תַּחַת שְׁמֵי אֲדֹנָי
עִם הַגַּל וְעִם הַדְּרוֹר
יַזְהִיר אַף יְצַלְצֵל שִׁירִי.

Come, Let's Go Out...
(1908)

Come, let's go out, my dear one,[108]
come, let's go out, let's go out-
I am here to tell you, spring is here;
from behind the fence of my garden
a bud can be seen, a bud can be seen,
the voice of a swallow was heard on the top of my house.

From early in the morning
a joyful brightness
does not leave the front of your house;
a joyful brightness
kissing the *m'zuzot* of your doorways.
Go out to greet them, my dear one
and they will permeate and rejuvenate you
and put a glimmer in your eyes.

The grace of God has pervaded the land,
upon wings[109] of light
upon wings of light-
and in the rivulets the waters are singing:
spring has come! spring has come!
The trees in the garden are coming to life,[110]
the cherry blossoms are so white.

In my heart the flower of my love has come to life again
and has given off its aroma-
Go out and bless my heart with your springtime;
I also, I also will infuse in you my rejuvenation.
And I will bless you and I will make you bloom
Cloaked in light, dressed in white,
and in your braid a blue ribbon,
Come out to me like a breath of fresh air![111]

And you will be bright and you will laugh,
let your laughter be full of grace,
and let your scent be like an apple tree.

---

[108] Song of Songs 4:9.
[109] Poetic license taken as the term in Hebrew is actually singular.
[110] Poetic license taken once again.
[111] Translated more literally as, "A vision of grace."

Together let us trek off into the field,
over the hills and through the valleys,
and I will pick forget-me-nots;
I will surely gather pearls of dew
pearls of dew for you as a beaded necklace.

I am going to gather rays of light,
rays of light,
and I will pick some lilies-of-the-valley;
I will make you a wreath of beautiful buds
golden wreaths, golden wreaths,
and I will tie them on your head like little crowns.

Together we went down to the brook
and like you full of softness,
happy, clear, and airy,
my poem will glow and ring with the ripple and with the swallow
under the heavens of God.

The poem begins with a reference to the Song of Songs. Jews read the Song of Songs in springtime. The main character, thus, announces the arrival of spring, mentioning that he has spotted a bud and has heard the voice of the swallow. He expresses complete joy in the bright sun that literally kisses the *m 'zuzot* of this woman's home, as he again invites her to come outside and feel rejuvenated by springtime. In the third stanza Bialik writes about spring as a sign of God's grace, carried upon wings of light. It was probably a long, dark winter, and now the sunshine does not go away, a babbling brook is singing, and the garden is coming to life again.

In the fourth stanza the man in the poem compares himself to the spring itself. The flower of his love is giving off its scent and he invites the woman yet again, to join him outside. The poem is very sweet. Yet at this point, certain erotic images appear. There are references to light and the woman's braid, images that in other poems we have

surmised as having sexual connotations. He intends to infuse his spring into her, as well as invites hers into his.

The man wants to be as one with her when they head out to the field to enjoy nature. The two will trek together over hills and through valleys, picking flowers and transforming them into jewelry. He describes her as soft, happy, and pure, and his poem as singing like the stream and with the swallow under God's heavens.

One of the most significant phrases in the poem is from the fourth verse of the first stanza, "*meachorei geder* -- from behind a fence." Bialik, in fact, wrote an entire story called, "From Behind the Fence." In it he tells the tale of a relationship between a young Jewish boy and a young non-Jewish woman. The woman, Marinka, lives literally on the other side of a fence, and exists a world away. Though a forbidden relationship the two become friends in their adolescence. Yet something corrupts their ability to relate to each other positively. In the end, the young man ends up despising the girl. The story is full of unhealthy social dynamics, and includes a feeling of lost innocence. Ratosh claims that the real pull within Bialik --one he may or may not have admitted to-- was this erotic love he possessed for a non-Jewish woman. Although not enough proof exists to fully substantiate the theory that such a woman existed, the notion of this type of obsession for Jewish male intellectuals is not foreign to Jewish writing from Philip Roth in the United States to Benjamin Tammuz in Israel.

The metaphor of the fence is a powerful one. Aberbach builds on its interpretation. He elaborates on the image of the door-handle in, "At the Handle of the Latch," as study of S.Y. Agnon. Aberbach believes it reveals a young man's hesitancy in

courting young ladies. The young man wants to enter the room to have an erotic relationship with a woman, but he is afraid to lift the latch and enter the room in which the young woman is found.

This next and final poem from 1908, however, stands in contrast to the two prior. "*Hayah Erev Ha-Kayitz* -- One Summer Evening," is a poem that bemoans the power of lustful, sexy women. It depicts nature as ruled by mythological female figures.

הָיָה עֶרֶב הַקַּיִץ

וּבְנוֹת לֵילִיּוֹת זַכּוֹת שׁוֹרְרוֹת מִזְרוֹת בַּלְבָנָה
חוּטֵי כֶסֶף מַזְהִירִים.
וְתַן אַרְעוֹת כְּסוּת אַחַת לְכֹהֲנִים גְּדוֹלִים
וְלִמְעַדְּלֵי חֲזִירִים.

הָיָה עֶרֶב הַקַּיִץ. כָּל־הַבָּתִּים נִתְרוֹקְנוּ
וְנִתְמַלְּאוּ הַגַּגִּים:
יָצָא אָדָם, כְּדַרְכּוֹ, בְּמַאֲרָיו הַגְּדוֹלִים
לַחֲטָאָיו הַקְּטַנִּים.

קָצְרָה רוּחַ הָאָדָם. כָּלוּ צֵיצֵי מְיַחֵל –
וּתְפִלָּתוֹ הָאַחַת:
„הַכּוֹכָבִים הַצְּנוּעִים, מַהֲרוּ צֵאתְכֶם מִלְּמַעְלָה,
וְהַקְּדֵשׁוֹת מִתָּחַת!"

וּבֵן זֶה הַחֹלֶה נְגִינָה קַלָּה, הוֹלֵלָה –
וְהַגֶּן כֻּלּוֹ נֶעְעָר,
וּמִבֵּין הָאִילָנוֹת הִנֵּה הִשְׁחִיר וְנֵב צָעִיף
וְהִלְבִּינָה כְּנַף סִנָּר.

וּכְסַרְסוּרֵי עֲבֵרָה קוֹרְצִים, רוֹמְזִים כּוֹכָבִים,
וַעֲיֵיתָם פִּי הִבְעוֹת;
צָרַר רוּחַ הַזְּנוּתִים גַּם אֶת־עֲשָׁבוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה
וְאֶת־אַבְנֵי הָרְחֹבוֹת.

וּמֵאֲמְצַע הַנָּהָר וּמִפְּרוֹמֵי הַמְּזוֹרוֹת
וּמֵאֲחֲרֵי הַגְּדֵרוֹת
בָּא הַצְּחוֹק – וּבְחַלּוֹנוֹת מוּרָדִים וִילוֹנוֹת
וְכֶבִים הַגְּרוֹת.

הַס, הַשְׁאֵר נָתַן רֵיחוֹ, זוֹלֵל סוֹבֵא הָעוֹלָם,
יֵין עֲנָבִים עֲבָרוֹ,
וְהוּא יוֹצֵא מִדַּעְתּוֹ וּמִתְגּוֹלֵל בְּקִיאוֹ
וּמִתְבּוֹסֵס בְּבִשָּׂרוֹ.

וּבְנוֹת לֵילִיּוֹת זַכּוֹת שׁוֹרְרוֹת מִזְרוֹת בַּלְבָנָה
חוּטֵי כֶסֶף מַזְהִירִים.
וְתַן אַרְעוֹת כְּסוּת אַחַת לְכֹהֲנִים גְּדוֹלִים
וְלִמְעַדְּלֵי חֲזִירִים.

One Summer Evening
(1908)

Daughters of Lilith, pure, pure interlaced with white
threads of silver shining,
and they are weaving magically for the great priests
and for the raising of pigs.

One summer evening all the daughters emptied out
and filled the gardens:
a man went out on his way with his great lust
for his small sins.[112]

A man loses his nature,[113]his eyes tired of hoping[114] -
and his one prayer:
"Oh modest stars, come out quickly from above,
and prostitutes from down below!"

And in this garden their began a frivolous melody -
and all of the garden begins stirring,
and between the trees, behold he sees the dark edge of a scarf
and a white shirt.

And like the middlemen of sinful lust, the stars are winking,
and their eyes of gold pushing him;
the spirit of promiscuity[115]also carries along blades of grass
and stones in the street.

And from in the midst of the river and from the high balconies
and from behind the fences
the laughter comes- and in the windows shades are lowered
and lights go out.[116]

Hush, the flesh gives forth its fragrance[117]
a sensuality inducing wine has intoxicated the world,
and he goes out of his mind and rolls in its vomit
and wallows in its flesh.

---

[112] Psalm 104:23.
[113] Job 21:4.
[114] Psalm 69:4... "I am weary of my crying."
[115] Hosea 4:19.
[116] Proverbs 31:18.
[117] Song of Songs 1:12.

Daughters of Lilith, pure, pure interlaced with white
threads of silver shining,
and they are weaving magically for the great priests
and for the raising of pigs.

The poem begins with a reference to the descendants of Lilith. Lilith is a character often depicted in the Jewish tradition as a temptress. Here, Bialik employs the term to refer to prostitutes. It is no mistake that Bialik also mentions the raising of unkosher pigs in the first stanza. In the poem's second stanza it is these "ladies of the evening" that fill the park and cause men to visit brothels. The term most commonly used for prostitute is *zona*, but ironically Bialik employs the literary word ***kedusha*** instead. In addition, the euphemism he chose to use for brothel comes from Psalm 104:23. Bialik uses verses from the Book of Job and Psalm 69 to convey how a man loses his mind with regard to sexy women. By using the terms "*mozrot*" and "hidden stars," Bialik professes that sexy women and magic have similar temptations. One definition of the word "*mozrot*" includes constellations. Bialik alludes to horoscopes here.

The poem's fourth stanza describes the encounter between a man in search of pleasure and young women of the night. The garden's darkness contrasts with the singing of the bustle of women wearing scarves and white shirts. This "spirit of promiscuity" described in the fifth stanza is a phrase taken from the prophet Hosea. Here it describes the whoring of young men and women in sinful lust, which contrasts with the purity of nature.

Again we find the phrase, "behind the fence." Here its implications are endless. It refers to forbidden relationships. In addition, the clause also speaks literally to the private encounters of men and prostitutes. These encounters occur not only behind the fence, but

the laughter of foreplay also descends from the high balconies where window shades are drawn. What occurs then? Bialik appeals to our sense of smell as wine and sex give forth their scent. The world gets so drunk that the man, out of his mind, rolls in his vomit. The entire poem is quite upsetting and it may be Bialik's angriest or most cynical expression of the torments and the degrading aspects of sexuality.

(1910-....)

Bialik's work contains humor too, though often to convey a serious message. In this next poem, published in 1910, Bialik creates a cute jingle. The poem, "*Echad, Shtayim*... -- One, Two" like so many others, loses its meter and rhyme scheme when translated. Please consult the Hebrew if possible.

אַחַת, שְׁתַּיִם

אַחַת, שְׁתַּיִם, שָׁלֹשׁ, אַרְבַּע –
הִזְמִין אַל לְךָ אִשָּׁה – בְּחַר־בָּהּ!

אַל תִּתְמַהְמַהּ, אַל תְּאַחֵר,
שֶׁמָּא יְקַדֶּמְךָ אַחֵר.

אַף אָנֹכִי דְּבַשׁ מָצָאתִי –
אַךְ־לֹא בָא אֶל־פִּי וּשְׂפָתִי.

שְׁתַּיִם הָיוּ לָאַלְמָנָה:
אַחַת שְׁחֹרָה וְאַחַת לְבָנָה.

לֹא צְלָמוֹת – מַרְגָּלִיּוֹת,
פְּרֵדוֹת נָאוֹת רַפִּיפִיּוֹת.

אַשְׁרֵי מִי שֶׁרָאָה פְּנֵיהֶן –
וַאֲנִי אָהַבְתִּי שְׁתֵּיהֶן.

אַךְ אֵין מַגִּיד, אַךְ אֵין פּוֹתֵר,
מִי מֵהֶן אָהַבְתִּי יוֹתֵר.

עָבְרָה עֵת, לֹא אֵדַע כַּמָּה,
וָאֶתְמַהְמַהּ, וָאֶתְמַהְמָהּ.

פִּתְאֹם בָּא הַשֵּׁד וְחָסְמָן –
שֵׁד גְּדָל־בְּלוֹרִית וְשֵׁד גְּדָל־שָׂפָם.

וַאֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי, גֹּלֶם,
רַוָּק זָקֵן עַד הָעוֹלָם.

וּמִכָּאן לְכָל־הַנְּעָרִים
מוּסַר הַשְׂכֵּל וּמֵישָׁרִים:

אַחַת, שְׁתַּיִם, שָׁלֹשׁ, אַרְבַּע –
הִזְמִין אַל לְךָ אִשָּׁה – בְּחַר־בָּהּ!

אַל תִּתְמַהְמַהּ, אַל תְּאַחֵר,
שֶׁמָּא יְקַדֶּמְךָ אַחֵר.

One, Two...
(1910)

One, two, three, four-
if God brings a woman your way- take her!

Don't be late, don't tarry,[118]
lest another will beat you to it!

I, too, found honey,[119]
but it never came to my lips.[120]

A widow had two daughters:
one dark and one fair.

Not girls - pearls,
lovely and beautiful mares.

Happy is the one that saw their faces-
but I loved the both of them.

There was no fortuneteller and no seer,
to tell which one I loved greater.

Time passed, I do not know how much,
and I delayed and delayed.

Suddenly, the devil came and grabbed them away-
one devilish guy with a big shock of hair and another devilish guy with a big mustache.

And I remained like a damn fool,
an old bachelor forever.

And from my misfortune I advise all young men
a cautionary tale that I am giving to you straight:[121]

One, two, three, four-
if God brings a woman your way- take her!

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[118] Ecclesiastes 5:3.
[119] Proverbs 25:16.
[120] Ezekiel 4:14.
[121] Proverbs 1:3.

Don't be late, don't tarry,[122]
lest another will beat you to it!

One cannot negate Bialik's folk appeal. Yet what appears to be a light jingle, may actually open a window to a larger issue. Using a folk venue Bialik here portrays a cultural problem of his generation. The ditty clearly reflects some sense of reality in that it speaks to the insecurity intellectuals feel in the dating game. This is most evident in his description of the devilish men who snatched his lover away. One had a big shock of hair and the other a big mustache. It is a fact that Bialik was bald, and was probably envious of one of his contemporaries, Saul Tchernichovsky. Tchernichovsky had a lot of hair and a big mustache which, at that time especially, was considered a sign of masculinity! Thus the poem reveals a lovers' triangle. It tells the story of the intellectual Jew who must compete for the affection of a young woman with the more burley, masculine, and earthy fellow.

Not unlike in its English equivalent, the popular song "On Top of Old Smoky," Bialik's poem takes the form of giving advice to young lads. The speaker advises young men in the beginning and at the end of the poem not to delay pursuing love, if they are lucky enough to find it. Ecclesiastes, another advisor of young men, drives the point home. He reminds people that when they vow an oath to God, they must not delay in paying it back. Bialik continues by using quotations from Proverbs 25 and Ezekiel 4 in order to tell his story. The first proverb states that, "once you have found honey, eat as much as sufficient for you lest you be sated and vomit it up." Ezekiel adds the concept of bringing it to his lips. Using these two passages from the *Tanach*, Bialik tells his readers

[122] Ecclesiastes 5:3.

in the third stanza that he too had found honey, but never brought it to his lips. He reveals how he delayed and delayed after he found love, and suddenly it was too late!

Two Hebrew words require special mention. The first, "*vaet-mah 'mah*," is from the eighth stanza of the poem. Even today it is not used in everyday speech. It can, however, be found in the famous liturgical, philosophical piece, "*Ani Maamin*." The piece contains the request that the messiah not delay. The second is the word, "*ne 'arim*." In Yiddish and in German the word means young fools. On the holiday in *Simchat Torah* Jews offer a blessing called the "*Kol Hane 'arim*." It is customary that all young boys under the age of thirteen stand underneath a large *tallit* and say the blessing together. The juxtaposition of the folk expression "*ne 'arim*" with the more learned usage "*vaet-mah 'mah*" epitomizes Bialik's ability to blend these two dimensions of his art.

The final love poem that deserves mention here is the short ditty, "*Minhag Hadash* -- A New Fashion." Please consult the Hebrew in order to capture its rhyme scheme.

מְנוֹנָג חָדָשׁ

מְנוֹנָג חָדָשׁ בָּא לַמְּדִינָה:
שִׁמְלַת שֵׁשׁ וּכְתֹנֶת פַּסִּים –
וּבְשַׁבָּתוֹת, בֵּין הָעַצְיִם,
פּוֹרְחִים נְשִׁיקוֹת וַאֲנָסִים.

מְנוֹנָג חָדָשׁ בָּא לַמְּדִינָה:
נַעֲלֵי מֶשִׁי עִם קְשׁוּרִים –
וַעֲלֵי צַוָּאר נַעֲרָה אַחַת
תּוֹלִים עֶצֶם שֶׁנֵּי בַּחוּרִים.

מְנוֹנָג חָדָשׁ בָּא לַמְּדִינָה:
אָתְמוֹל חַנָּה, מָחָר פְּנִינָה;
אֲבָל חֻזְקָאלִי מַחֲמִיד –
לִי לְבַדִּי. לִי לְבַדִּי.

A New Fashion[123]

A new fashion has come to the land:
a silk dress and colorful blouse.

and on the *Sabbaths*, between the trees-
bloom kisses and pears.

A new fashion has come to the land:
silk shoes with ribbons-
and upon the neck of one young lady,
two young attentive fellows hang around.

A new fashion has come to the land:
yesterday *Hannah*, tomorrow *Peninah*;
but *Hezkeli* my delight-
He is all mine, all mine.[124]

In this short folk poem, Bialik writes about trendiness. The poem is rather sweet, and captures the notion that customs come and go. He mentions clothing, specifically blouses and shoes, and names. The use of names might also be a criticism of the fickleness that comes with multiple partners in the game of love. Most poetic is how he points out that two young men hang around the neck of a young lady.

[123] A more literal translation would be, "custom."
[124] Psalm 51.

Conclusion

Hayyim Nahman Bialik is celebrated in Israel and throughout the world as one of the foremost poets in modern Jewish literature. He was a highly complex human being, and his writing clearly reflects this. With a background in Jewish texts, he began his career as a poet by writing about the love of Zion. He emerged from life in the yeshiva, and eventually fell under the influence of Ahad Haam. Ahad Haam helped him understand the central problem of his day: how to live in a modern world, while still preserving and advancing the rich heritage of Judaism. Yet according to some critics, such as Dov Sadan, Ahad Haam's overly intellectual influence was on some level stultifying for Bialik. While living in Odessa, Bialik turned his attention to the inner struggles of the self, of nature, and of love. His poetry during this time allows us to learn a great deal about Bialik the man.

In order to best understand Bialik from a psychological perspective, we must read his poetry with an attentiveness to his personal messages. Scholars like Aberbach, Bar Yosef, Ratosh, and Zemach have led the way in this endeavor. Aberbach, who does refer to Bialik as a Romantic-Nationalistic poet, still shows an awareness of the psychological approach. He identifies guilt and despair as characteristic of much of Bailik's work; and he traces it to Bialik's sense of having been abandoned by his father, who died when Bialik was a very young child. He also claims that for much of the early part of Bialik's career, Bialik composed poetry in the shadow of the Torah. Only later would Bialik struggle to emerge as a poet with an original voice of his own.[125] Yet Aberbach also discusses a variety of worldly influences on Bialik. He points out the great effect that Russian society,

[125] Aberbach, David. *Bialik*. New York: Grove Press, 1988. P. 22.

the Hasidic movement, and Romanticism had on Bialik's work. Thus, Aberbach, while showing an awareness of the psychological influences, still portrays Bailik as a Nationalistic and Zionistic poet. Other scholars, like Jacobson, also still emphasize the nationalistic aspects of Bialik's work. By doing so, however, Jacobson has retreated to even earlier interpretations, and has neglected current scholarship.

In another vein, Bar Yosef criticizes scholarship that focuses too heavily on the psychological. She suggests that Ratosh and Zemach may have gone too far in their analysis, but that older approaches are outdated. By analyzing other movements during Bialik's time, such as the literary movements of Decadence and Romanticism, she suggests a corrective for study. She maintains that while we can never be totally sure about the psychological makeup of Bialik's personality, we can at least paint a picture of Bialik the man. Such a picture allows us to determine who he was, and why his work is so widespread.

Bialik's popularity in the past, as well as today, results from people relating to his work. The tensions that dwell within Bialik exist to some extent in all of us. Themes such as the pain of abandonment or lost innocence resonate with the realities of our own personal experiences. Who among us had not undergone some sort of loss? Who among us does not desire to change, to undergo transformation? The multifaceted messages of Bialik's poems echo specifically in Jewish souls. They reverberate in all who acculturate themselves into the world of the Hebrew Bible. They tease and challenge our knowledge of Jewish texts, wisdom, and experience.

Throughout the twentieth century men from yeshivot and modern Jewish intellectuals alike personally experienced the themes about which Bialik writes. They struggled with the tensions that exit between Judaism's strictures concerning abstinence and the primacy of serious study, on the one hand, and modern expressions of sexuality on the other. The inhibitions of the Victorian period and of bourgeois society in general further complicate the profile of young men on the cusp of modernity such as Bialik. Picture life a century ago. Imagine the variety of existing cultures and the traditional ways that their young men and women courted. Consider what it was like to feel lured away from one's studies, one's observance of Jewish law, one's own culture and understanding of the world. In some way, each of our internal fantasies seduces us away from the world of our intellects and our religions. Therefore, Bialik's world of poetry can hold up a mirror to some of our own conflicts and challenges.

Appendix

Gershon Shaked, ed., *Bialik, Yetsirato le-Sugehah bi-Re'i ha-Biqqoret*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974

TRANSLATION: "The Poetry of Foreign Love by Bialik"
by *Yonatan Ratosh*

"...The Scroll of Fire" -

There is a basis to think that Bialik thought it (The Scroll) was the best of his work. It is one of his works that he devoted an oral lecture to - (before Tel-Aviv teachers in 1933.) This is an especially interesting thing, since in this lecture he did not say essentially anything clear. He only said that in this work there is an internal unity, and that a specific explanation would require an intimate detailing from a period of his life.

Let us add that The Scroll of Fire is in a sense, Bialik's "Song of Songs." There are clues alluded to it in almost all of his poems (poems of nature - poems of *yeshiva* - poems of love - poems of wrath); and It (the Scroll) is the most beloved poem by those members of his generation, and by those who shared in his educational background - the ones who see in him an expression of their personal poet.

Similarly, The Scroll of Fire serves as a kind of sign-post in the work of Bialik: it designates the beginning of the "period of silence" attributed to the poet.

Notwithstanding this, The Scroll of Fire is cryptic in the works of Bialik, and even though all the critics of his generation attempted to explicate it, they were unable to interpret it. The difficulty is that this poem is ostensibly collective, in the utmost a poem of the public. A secondary title is from 'Legends of the Destruction' and it touches also subjects of redemption and exile, inclusive of its seer and rebuker; but the essence of the

work leaves the impression that it is 'poetry of the individual', a poem of love that did not reach its fulfillment.

Finally, it was almost like The Scroll of Fire went out from the hand of Bialik unconsciously; in the beginning he only intended to write 'Legends of the Destruction' alone, but the first three chapters only take up approximately one-seventh of the work. The whole subject of love came up afterwards, without being thought about in the beginning.

Almost all interpreters of The Scroll of Fire approached it from the collective side, from 'Legends of the Destruction,' as Bialik intended in the beginning of his thought. Let us try, therefore to approach it from the second, personal side.

The personal protagonist of The Scroll of Fire is 'a clear-eyed lad,' from the captivity of Jerusalem, that goes in search of the remains of the fire of the alter.[126] He reached it, and in the instant that it was grasped, he jumped into the River of Eternal Damnation - into the arms of a young girl outstretched to him from within the depths of the river. Swept in this river to the land of exile, he became there a seer and rebuker of the children of exile.[127]

There is an aspect of the personal in part of the plot in the Scroll. To the plot one must also add a second plot which precedes it: a story with 200 young men and 200 young women from the captivity of Jerusalem, whom the enemy left naked on a desolate

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[126] This quest is part of his prophetic call. See also the first few lines of the poem, "*Ha-Matmid* -- The Talmud Student."

[127] This does not refer to the experience of any particular prophet, though Ezekiel was a prophet of exile.

island, these alone and those alone. They wandered astray until they met up with the River of *Avadon*, and the boys and girls alike were swept away by it.

Behold in our examining of the subject of the 200 young boys and 200 young girls on the one hand and the portion of the lad on the other, with the image of the young girl and the image of the holy fire - it appears clear that actually there is only one plot but two versions. One is a collective, sort of like a choir before the solo, and the second version is personal; the story itself is one: in the first episode 200 young boys are jumping into the river after 200 young women; in the second part, a young lad confesses love before a young woman standing across the river opposite him, and in the end he jumps into it, into her arms.

The symbolic aspect of the portion of the 200, the aspect of the choir, is obvious: They are like archetypes. There is only two of them, supernatural beings who are equal in stature and in strength. The two of them, with their large eyes wide open, and the sound of their marching sounded like the marching of one mysterious man. It is like they are quarreling over the souls of the 200 - like two psychic forces in the heart of one person.

The two of them are these, the one is the lad with clear eyes, and the second is the man with angry eyebrows. He is the poet of the poetry of hate. Usually attention is directed for some reason to the polarity between the adjective angry of eyebrows compared with clear eyes; but it appears that entirely no less characteristic is the polarity contrasted between the boy and the man.

When the water spews out the boy to a far land, that is the land of exile, he assumes another form. He changes into another man. When his eyes finds a complacent

and confident heart, it pierces the heart and contaminates it until death. And in the hour that he sees the people of wrath and hatred, his heart writhes with their hearts, and he is afflicted seven-fold through all their sufferings. The change that occurred in the soul of the psyche is clear: he is no longer searching for the star of his life,[128] but rather for what his soul has lost; no longer is he of clear eyes, but angry of eyebrows. More than anything, he is no longer a young lad. The young lad has changed into a man. The whole essence of The Scroll of Fire is how the young lad with clear eyes has changed into a man with angry eyebrows.

The answer is very natural and in the utmost clear: it came as a result of his jumping into the woman's arms that were extended to him - in his sexual encounter with the Woman![129]

In another poem, that Bialik wrote two years prior, he recounts about the same experience. That is the poem "Those Hungry Eyes":

Those hungry eyes that a certain number are being searched...
all the glory of this body...
if only you knew my beauty...
in a short moment of luxury,
and my whole world lay shattered,
how high a price your body has exacted!

Behold for some reason the encounter with the Woman is a strange thing...why did it have to ruin the world, his protagonist, and the symbol of Bialik; For what reason does this earthiness stand in sharp polarity against his spiritual world that is built on the faithfulness of Judaism and the war for its fortifying of it. It is clear that there is here an

[128] Implied here is that the stars have fooled him or that his fate has misled him; he is "star-crossed."
[129] Conveyed here is the collective idea of the Feminine; the sexuality of Woman.

expression of something of a grave, personal tragedy. Bialik attributes this personal tragedy to the situation of the community, in the state of exile; his world was opened to him through some kind of immediately burning God; his soul, from the mountains of *Shomron*, oppressed by the hand of an old man from Judah, and until the end he remains standing in his state of great sorrow, the sorrow of the individual.

The secret of the polarity between this earthiness and his Jewish spiritual world, it appears, is concealed in the identity of this woman he encountered.

The description of the young woman in the collective version of the affair testifies to this identity. Like a group of light-footed angels, the group descends in a series of straight, white, lucid, tender young girls. In one line they are walking, their legs are straight, their hands are outstretched heavenwardly, grasping to the rays of the moon. And their eyes are closed like people who walk in their sleep. Thorny crowns are on their heads and upon their faces are frozen pangs of the messiah. Under the cover of their eyelids there sleeps an eternal faith, and upon the threshold of their lips there lies dormant a glow of laughter.

A group of tender angels, of lucid bodies, straight legs, faith in the world that under the covered eyelids, the glowing laughter that is on the lips, and above everything-thorny crowns and birthpangs of the Messiah, all of the above do not leave room for any mistake: this is the symbol of the Madonna, a symbol of Christian love, the foreign, a symbol of the non-Jewish woman. The polarity between the love of the earthiness of Bialik and between his spiritual world, placed in the framework of Judaism's mission stemming from the fact that his love is an alien love, love of the non-Jewish woman.

Evidence assisting us in seeing such things, which is liable perhaps to be astonishing, is clearly found in the stories of Bialik. "Big Harry" is the most boyish non-Jewish Jew clearly from the childhood of Bialik, and his clear affection of anyone found in the area given to him. It is the author from the story "Behind the Fence," this youth is none other than an old Noah from whose childhood - and until his marriage according to Moses and Israel - all of his love is given to Marinka the non-Jewish girl.

Indeed, confirmation of another type, perhaps much more persuasive, is found in the Scroll itself. His intention of the last segment of his work: after "Prophet of Exile" he remains alone with his dreams and his pains, and behold they are the sorrow of the individual. The young angel tilts the cup of muted sorrow and spills from it one tear after the other.

The cup of sorrow it is the cup that according to the *Aggadah*, gathered into it all the loyal tears of the people in pain, and when it becomes full the redemption will come; What are the tears that the young angel poured from the cup of sorrow, when the prophet of exile remained alone with his personal sorrow? There is no room for doubt. He pours from there the tears of the prophet himself, which beforehand, he collected into his cup like the community's loyal tears. Now it is made clear that these are not them, thus, behold, he becomes aware of his mistake and pours them out from the place that they were gathered to him in error. That is to say: the final segment of The Scroll of Fire leaves room to see that it is like a confession of Bialik. His poems which are called nationalistic...they are poems to which he only gives lip service, not heartfelt; poems which

are untrustworthy because true sorrow is the sorrow of the individual; the aforementioned love that was thwarted.

Do we have here a conscious confession? Evidence exists from before this creative work, and evidence about the poetry of Bialik after the writing of The Scroll of Fire. Because it was not silence, as it is accepted to think, that came upon Bialik after The Scroll of Fire. The was only here a change in the character of his poetry. His prior poetry, which was called nationalistic had ceased.

From The Scroll of Fire and onward, there is not in Bialik, even one poem for the public, for the nationalistic oneness that is expressing even a tiny piece of hope. There is, on the contrary, a non-identification between him and the public. He and the public appear now always like strangers, hostile to one another.[130]

Characteristic also is his second poem dedicated for Ahad Haam, "On this Sea of Death." Prominent here is the total lack of hope, a complete annihilation of the future, vis-à-vis the amazing sense of hope and life, feelings of a battalion set out to battle, which beats in the first poem for Ahad Haam, that was written approximately three years prior.

Piercing, it is the conclusion that is in the poem, "Twilight Piece."

I looked for your penny but I lost my crown,
Is what I see within?
While the Devil is standing behind me,
Grinning his cruel grin.

Pierced no less is the summary of the poem, "They Shake Off the Dust."

Seven levels of *Gehinom*,
they burnt me in life,
they will burn me in death...

[130] Please note the date the article was published.

and if I will rot in the grave - let me decay for certainty,
and I will dream about your death
and will burst out laughing and dream about your rotting.

The same sharp contrast between the "I" and "You all" is prominent also in "Prophet, Run Away."

I shall seek out the valleys of my home,
Make forest pacts with sycamores, and stay.
And you, to whom decay and plague have come -
Tomorrow's storm will flick you all away.

However, the most open, sharpest confession is the poem, "And who is the man?" And thus Bialik completes his poem with this:

to the point of choking up from a combination of powerlessness and bitterness.
to the point of abominating the sorrow of father and mother
and to the point of cursing the name of their God -
Behold my soul...
Exposing all of its afflictions it will stand there,
and because of all of its terrible pains,
and with all of its failure and insult.

The difference between Bialik's poems after The Scroll of Fire and his earlier poetry, testify that, indeed, The Scroll of Fire, this is the "Song of Songs" of Bialik. It is the song of a strange love; an expression of a complex love from a young lad to a young woman, a non-Jewish woman.

The explanation of the strange appearance so far, even though the writers and critics from Bialik's generation wrote a lot about his creations, do not understand in its simple meaning, his heart, like the poems of a foreign love, the female non-Jew, of the Jew that went out to the world of the non-Jews: There occurred to them what the meaning for Bialik himself was when he gave a lecture about the Scroll of Fire: whether he ignored the essence, or whether he saw fit to hide it, even if the matter slipped out of his

consciousness. Like him, for all of the people of that generation the concept of a foreign love, the symbol of the foreign love, was their problem the same that it was for Bialik. It is sad that only a few friends and the closest people to the generation of Bialik (understood this.) Yet they did not see the need to tell us the biographic details about this side of Bialik's life.

Perhaps this also is the great secret of the love that Bialik's generation harbors until today. Masters of education liken all of it, for its educational purposes, to his personal poems. They really love the personal poetry of that person who is the national poet which appears, apparently, not in vain. It is remote for those who are not of his generation: the secret of this alien love, a secret of the love of the non-Jews, inclusive of everything connected with it. Still, he did not say to them that he cannot say anything.

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